Supernatural Merit

Rev. F. S. Reuter, C. SS. R.

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SUPERNATURAL MERIT

YOUR TREASURE IN HEAVEN

A TREATISE ON THE NATURE OF SUPERNATURAL MERIT AND ON THE WAYS AND MEANS OF SECURING A HIGH DEGREE OF GLORY IN HEAVEN.

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BY

REV. F. J. REMLER, C.M.

"Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

MATT. 6, 19.

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TO

MARY IMMACULATE

THE MOTHER OF DIVINE GRACE

THIS TREATISE

IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

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INTRODUCTION

The following conversation between William and Father Bernard, his pastor, will show sufficiently the purpose of this little book entitled: "Supernatural Merit, Your Treasure in Heaven."

William had called at the pastor's residence to arrange for an anniversary Requiem Mass. After the pastor had recorded the date in his calendar, the young man said: "Father, if you are not too busy this evening I would like to ask you to clear up for me some very vexing difficulties, that have troubled me considerably since our last mission."

"Most willingly," replied the kind-hearted priest. "I happen to be free this evening, so that I can give you all the time that may be necessary to clear up your difficulties. But come, let us sit on the porch, where the air is cool. Now, what are your difficulties?"

"I find it impossible," William began, after making himself comfortable in the rocking-chair which the priest had offered him, "to reconcile some of the missionary's statements with what my catechism teaches about God's justice."

"And how is that?" asked Fr. Bernard in a tone

NOTE.— This conversation is based on questions addressed to the author by various persons. These questions suggested the composition of this treatise.

of surprise. "I listened to all the sermons and am sure the missionary made no wrong statements."

"As I am not a theologian," answered William, "I am unable to pronounce judgment on that point, but I suppose he was correct in doctrine, and took care not to make any mistakes. But he certainly succeeded in raising some very troublesome doubts in my mind when in his sermon on the Mercy of God he insisted that a non-Catholic, or a pagan, who dies in the state of grace after receiving baptism on his death-bed, or having an earnest desire to be baptized, when baptism is impossible, is sure of possessing the eternal glory of heaven; also, that a bad Catholic, who may have descended into the lowest depths of wickedness, may still win the glory of heaven, if he makes a sincere confession before his death, or even, in case he cannot confess, if he makes an act of perfect contrition."

"Quite correct," said the priest; "for baptism, or the desire of baptism in the former case, and sincere repentance in the latter, put the soul in the state of sanctifying grace, and this grace entitles her to admission to heavenly glory."

"I can recognize in this easy way of winning heaven the infinite love and mercy of God towards the unfortunate sinner," commented William, "but how reconcile it with His infinite justice?"

"What leads you to think that God's justice is defeated?" asked Fr. Bernard.

"I cannot give a satisfactory answer to that question," replied William, "but if you do not object I shall try to make my position plain by briefly sketching the career of four men, who, according to the mis-

sionary's doctrine, have a right and title to heaven, though their lives on earth could hardly have been more contradictory."

"Concrete examples are always a valuable help in explaining religious truths. I am interested to hear the history of these men," said Fr. Bernard.

"In the first place," William began, "there lived in my home-town a certain Mr. Allen, one of God's saints, if such are still to be found in this world. All his life he was a most devout and virtuous Catholic, a staunch defender of his faith, and a thoroughly honest business-man. For many years he was a daily communicant, and it was his delight to visit and assist in every way the sick and the poor to whom he was a veritable father. In the midst of several very trying afflictions that tested his virtue, as though he were another Job — in the space of two years he lost his wife and six children — he displayed a truly heroic patience and resignation. He died the death of a saint after a lingering and very painful illness. I am sure he is now enjoying the glory of heaven, for if any man is entitled to it, he certainly is.

"In the next place I was acquainted with a non-Catholic by the name of Brown. He was an honest and good man, in his own way, but did not trouble himself about religious affairs. His wealth enabled him to enjoy the good things of life and he often declared he saw no reason for not doing so as long as he did no injustice to anyone. However, a troublesome illness made him take a more serious view of life. After reading one day Bishop Stang's 'Spiritual Pepper and Salt,' which chanced to fall into his hands,

he called for a priest, and after an interview with him, had himself instructed and was received into the Church. Ten days later he died a very edifying death, expressing only one regret, namely that he embraced the faith so late in his life. I am told he is entitled to the glory of heaven, just the same as is Mr. Allen.

"Then I knew a fallen away Catholic named Hall. For the last forty years of his life he did not see the interior of a church, and his life was a source of scandal to the whole parish. While a long illness confined him to his bed for over two years, he persistently refused to see the priest who made several attempts to visit him. Even when told that he could not live more than two weeks he spurned all spiritual aid. However, about three hours before he died he requested his daughter to call for the pastor, telling her he felt his end was near and that he desired to make his peace with God. The priest answered the summons immediately, but when he arrived, Mr. Hall had lapsed into a state of unconsciousness, from which he never rallied. On the strength of his request for a priest and his desire to confess, the pastor gave him absolution and administered Extreme Unction. Supposing now that Mr. Hall had contrition and thereby obtained the pardon of his sins, he too is saved and like Mr. Allen and Mr. Brown, is entitled to the happiness of heaven.

"And lastly, I knew a most unfortunate man, who was literally steeped in wickedness. Besides other crimes he was guilty of several very revolting murders, which he expiated on the gallows. For a long time he remained impenitent, but two days before his execution he called for the chaplain of the prison and

made his peace with God. The chaplain declared he never saw any man more contrite and truly penitent than this poor criminal. I am sure his sins are pardoned and, like the other three men, he has a claim to the enjoyment of heavenly glory.

"And now, Father, comes the core of my difficulty. If the same heaven is awarded to each of these four men, whose lives on earth were so different in every respect, where does the justice of God manifest itself? If the same heaven is their common reward, what did Mr. Allen *gain* by his life of virtue, and what did the other three *lose* by their lives of pleasure, sin and crime? After extracting every possible sensual gratification out of this life, they secured by a timely repentance and conversion, the same heaven as the saintly Mr. Allen gained only by a life of self-denial and faithful imitation of his Crucified Master. Will you kindly explain, Father?"

"I understand your difficulties, William," quietly replied the priest. "They have been proposed to me more than once in some form or other. There are unfortunately many, who, like yourself, are troubled about what they consider God's unfairness in the awarding of heaven. What is at the bottom of it all, is an imperfect understanding of the word 'heaven.' The missionary said indeed that all truly repentant sinners are sure of entering heaven, but he did not say that the heaven of repentant sinners is the same as that awarded to souls that have spent many years in love and grace and faithful service. You will learn presently that there is an immense difference between the glory of Mr. Allen and that of the other three;

and you will see that Mr. Allen *gained very much* by his life of virtue, and that the others *lost very much* by their failure to keep God's commandments during life. But in order to explain, let me ask you a few simple questions. The manufacturing company in which you are a manager, employs several thousand men?"

"Yes, Father, about five thousand."

"Every one of these, from the president down to the ordinary day-laborer, draws a monthly pay or salary?"

"Yes, Father."

"Now tell me," continued the priest, "does the word 'salary' imply that all the persons employed in your company receive the same amount of money when pay-day comes round?"

"Why, no, Father," answered William, laughing, "there is quite a difference between my salary and that of the president of the company."

"What determines these differences for all the employees?"

"Several things, Father. The position a man holds, the kind of work he does, the skill he displays and the amount of time he gives to actual work," replied William.

"Passing over the first three causes," continued Fr. Bernard, "tell me, has *time* much to do with determining the amount of wages earned?"

"Very much, Father; for every employee is timed, and on pay day receives not a cent more than his time-card entitles him to."

"Does a man who enters the employ of the firm

a week or a day before the monthly pay-day receive the same amount as he would if he had worked the whole month?"

"By no means," answered William; "such methods would soon force us to the wall. A week's or a day's pay is all that is given to such men."

"Has a man who refuses to work, or who fails to work according to the conditions laid down to him, or who persists in idling away his time, any right to demand a salary from the company?" insisted the priest.

"Not at all, Father; the company will not tolerate independent employees and promptly discharges all idlers."

"Now, my dear William," continued Fr. Bernard, "let us apply these few simple facts to your question. What the general terms *pay* or *salary* are to employees, *Heaven* is to Christians. A salary may stand for any sum of money, say from ten to fifty thousand dollars; heaven may denote any degree of glory ranging from that of baptized infants up to the glory of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A salary must be earned by work; Heaven must be earned by the service of God. An employee receives a definite amount of money, which is determined by his position, his skill, the nature of his work and the time he gives to his work; a Christian, who is admitted to heaven, receives a definite degree of glory, depending upon the quality of the service he rendered to God, the length of time devoted to it, and the kind and number of good works he performed in the state of sanctifying grace. Employees who refuse to work

according to the conditions laid down by the company, have no claim to any pay; men who refuse to serve God according to the conditions laid down by Him have no claim to the glory of heaven."

"How surprisingly simple and natural!" exclaimed the young man. "Why didn't I reason this out for myself long ago? But I suppose it is because I am like so many other Catholics — I do not *think* enough about my holy faith and its consoling teachings. According to your explanation, Father, I should judge that there must be an immense — I am tempted to say infinite — difference between the reward given to Mr. Allen and that given to the other three."

"Undoubtedly there is," replied the priest; "a vaster difference, perhaps, than there is between the dazzling splendor of the noonday sun and the dim light of a tallow candle. Mr. Allen's glory may be equal to that of a seraph, while the glory of the others may differ but slightly from that given to infants that die after baptism."

"Besides," Fr. Bernard continued, "several other points must not be overlooked. First, in the case of a converted sinner, it must be remembered, that a very long and painful purgatory may delay the soul's admission to the enjoyment of heavenly glory, for every defilement must be burned away before the soul can see God. Secondly, you must not consider the lot of a converted sinner as something enviable, because he enjoyed the good things of this life and indulged his passions to his heart's content, and then, as it were, forced his way into heaven by an opportune conversion in the hour of death. Death-bed conversions are

very deceptive, and are not always what they seem to be. Unless such a conversion is *sincere,* there is no heaven for the dying sinner. The fact that the priest does all he can and anoints an unconscious man does not necessarily mean that such a one is saved. The return, after recovery, to a life of sin, that we witness so often, seems to prove plainly that many death-bed conversions are a very doubtful affair. Remember there is a great truth in the sayings: 'As a man lives, so he dies,' and: 'Death is the echo of a man's life.' To whatever side a tree is leaning to that it will fall, unless a strong wind from the opposite direction, or the application of mechanical forces make it fall in the direction desired by the wood-cutter."

"I am very thankful for this explanation, Father, for this very point has often been on my mind," said the young man. "I now see clearly how foolish they are who continue to live in sin, trusting to 'fix up' just before death summons them to judgment. Besides, Father, our conversation has fairly revolutionized my ideas about heaven, and about God's justice as manifested in the awarding of eternal glory. And more than this — I see now, as never before, that every man has it in his power to shape his future glory and secure for himself a title to a definite amount of eternal happiness. It strikes me, that we Catholics are very foolish, to say the least, for not thinking, as we should, of these and similar joy-giving truths. Might we not predict, if the truth about heaven and the manner of winning it, were better known and understood, that the face of the whole world would soon undergo a change for the better?"

"Very true, very true, my dear William," answered the priest approvingly. "Much of the misery in the world to-day is due to the fact that heaven is lost sight of. Heaven is so far off for most men, that it is to them more like a dream than a reality. The thought of it does not rouse them to action, does not inspire them to serve and love God with all their heart, does not sustain and cheer them in times of trouble and affliction, does not prompt them to the exercise of charity and the practice of virtue in general. How differently they act when some temporal gain is in sight! Let it only be rumored that new gold fields or diamond mines have been discovered in some distant region and see how thousands quit home and family and expose themselves to every imaginable danger and hardship, simply because they are fired by the very uncertain hope of amassing a large fortune in a short time. But to win the certain and ever-enduring glory of heaven, men will scarcely move hand or foot."

"This is very true, Father," said William reflectingly; "it has often struck me, as I looked out of my office-window, and watched the great crowds in the streets jostling and elbowing one another, how totally absorbed in the passing things of this life, and absolutely thoughtless of the eternal realities of the next people really are. Like children engrossed in their toys, 'these children of a larger growth,' seem incapable of serious reflection; there seems to be no passing thought, even, of the great hereafter, of a hell to escape, of a heaven to win. Dress, pleasure, amusement, and sensual gratification seem to be about the only things many live for."

"Alas, yes," sighed Fr. Bernard, "the enemy of mankind is using the transitory delights of this world for the purpose of bewitching men into utter forgetfulness of their eternal interests. Men have grown money-crazed and pleasure-mad; on all sides we see a reckless pursuit of wealth, a feverish and consuming lust for coarse pleasure, a mad chasing after the delusive phantoms of sensual gratification, and but rarely do we find serious reflection on the inevitable and awful realities awaiting all men beyond the portals of death. What a fearful awakening to the reality of things there will be for many on their entrance into an eternity whence there is no return to profit by the mistakes of the past!"

"What do you think, Father, is the cause of this sad state of affairs?" asked William.

"Many causes are at work to produce such a condition," answered the priest. "The world has turned its back on God and rejected Him, as the Jews of old rejected our Lord. The observance of the Ten Commandments is too inconvenient for evil men, hence they cry: 'Who is the Lord that we should obey Him?' or: 'Away with Him, crucify Him!' Impious men, inspired by hell, have long labored systematically at rooting out of the hearts of individuals and of nations the knowledge of God and His holy law. The consequences are inevitable. A new paganism has sprung up and multitudes are its adherents. Is it not estimated that more than 40,000,000 of the American people profess no Christianity of any kind?

"But to limit my remarks to Catholics. Falling under the evil spell of their irreligious and godless sur-

roundings — like persons living in the miasmic air of swampy lowlands — many Catholics have gradually lost that high esteem for their holy faith, which in days of cruel persecution characterized their forefathers and in many cases made them undergo martyrdom rather than deny it; many, because they have long lived in an atmosphere of religious indifference and low morality, are no longer animated by Christian ideals, and no longer make the spirit and the maxims of the Gospel their rule of life; many others again have fostered intimate friendships and established family connections with non-Catholics of every shade of belief, and in consequence have either given up their faith, or at least have lost their attachment to it, so that their sentiments and actions are often more Protestant than Catholic. God alone knows, and the day of judgment will reveal, how many souls were lost to heaven through mixed marriages. I recollect a case where a mixed marriage resulted in the loss of the faith to seven children and forty-nine grandchildren — fifty-six souls in all — during the lifetime of the Catholic woman, who even on her deathbed could not be made feel the wrong she had done. Then again, worldliness in various forms is poisoning and paralyzing the spirit of faith in many souls. What wonder, that heaven should be forgotten, and men should live as if there were no hereafter!

Lastly — to reduce all possible causes to their principal source — the devil, man's sworn and implacable enemy, leaves nothing untried to accomplish two things, namely, to rob man of his glorious inheritance in heaven, and to plunge him into the greatest possible

misery in the abyss of hell. The process, which he employs, of drugging people into insensibility and forgetfulness of their eternal destiny in heaven, is evidently one of his most effective means of success."

"This sounds like a mission sermon, Father," William remarked with a smile; "and I must confess it is one of the most instructive I have ever heard. I am very grateful to you, Father, for favoring me with such a clear solution of my difficulties. Besides clearing up my doubts, it has made me resolve to meditate often on the reward reserved for us in heaven, and to labor perseveringly at securing the highest possible degree of eternal happiness. Can you recommend to me a book that will instruct me how to secure a rich treasure of supernatural merits, which I understand, are the purchase-coin of heavenly glory?"

"You have no idea, my dear William," replied the good priest, "how delighted I am to see your excellent dispositions. The great secret of success lies in this, that you learn how to sanctify every action and every moment of life in the service of God here on earth. I am glad to be able to assist you in learning this secret. Here is a little book entitled: 'Supernatural Merit, Your Treasure in Heaven,' which will show you how to transform by a spiritual alchemy the common and apparently worthless things of this life into most precious pearls and gems and diamonds of supernatural value, that will purchase for you 'an exceeding weight' of glory in God's eternal Kingdom. Keep this little book and study it attentively."

"Many thanks, Father, for your great kindness to me," said the young man as he rose to take leave.

"May God reward you most liberally for the great good you have done me this evening."

"I assure you, my dear William," replied Fr. Bernard, "it was one of the most pleasant evenings I spent in a long while. May God's grace be with you and enable you to carry out your resolution to lay up a rich store of treasure in heaven. Good night, William!"

"Good night, Father!"

SUPERNATURAL MERIT

YOUR TREASURE IN HEAVEN

CHAPTER I

YOUR ETERNAL DESTINY — THE GLORY OF HEAVEN.

1. THE DIGNITY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

"Behold, what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be [in reality] the sons of God." [1]

Sublime and exalted beyond comparison with all earthly dignities is the dignity which you possess by reason of your vocation to the faith in Jesus Christ. Over and above reason and free-will, those grand endowments, which are proper to human nature and which make man the lord and king of this material world, you have received from the infinite bounty of God still greater favors, such namely as confer on you a dignity infinitely superior to that enjoyed by the mightiest monarch that ever swayed a sceptre and wore a regal crown. In the sacrament of Baptism there was communicated to your soul the marvellous gift of divine grace, and you were thereby elevated to a plane

[1] 1 John 3; 1.

high above mere nature, even the most sublime. As long as you continue in the state of sanctifying grace, you rank higher in the eyes of God than even the highest angels, when considered in their natural state alone and apart from the grace they possess. By grace you enter into a most intimate relationship with Almighty God Himself, and are made the recipient of most extraordinary favors and privileges, which are not, like earthly advantages, fanciful and fictitious, but most true, real and substantial, and productive of the purest joys the heart of man can desire.

A most precious gift is the natural life which you have received from the bounty of God; so precious, indeed, that no earthly treasures can be put in the balance with it. But more precious still, and surpassing your natural life in an infinite degree, is the gift granted you in the sacrament of Baptism when by water and the Holy Ghost you were born into the supernatural life (the life of grace), received into the sonship of God, destined to be made a partaker of the Divine Nature, appointed a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, and endowed with a true and legitimate claim to the perfect and never-ending happiness of heaven, which is prepared for God's elect from all eternity. "You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba! (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God. And, if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and co-heirs with Christ."[1] "By whom [Jesus Christ] God hath given us most great and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine Nature."[2]

[1] Rom. 8; 15. [2] 2 Pet. 1; 4.

2. AN INALIENABLE TITLE TO THE GLORY OF HEAVEN.

"He chose us in Him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world."[1]

Behold, then, Christian soul, the sublime dignity conferred on you by the infinite goodness of your heavenly Father. You are in reality God's own beloved child, adopted into His sonship for the love of Jesus Christ, your Elder Brother; and you possess, as long as you continue in the state of sanctifying grace, a clear and inalienable title to a brilliant crown of immortal glory in your heavenly Father's eternal kingdom. Consider attentively what this means to you. The only son of a millionaire cannot boast of as clear a title to his father's vast estate, as you possess to the perfect happiness of heaven; and so inalienable is this title that no power on earth, no, not even the combined efforts of all the demons in hell can deprive you of your divinely appointed inheritance. And yet it may be lost to you. You may foolishly barter it away by the commission of mortal sin. Mortal sin will invariably rob you of that inheritance, which the devil with all his malice and all his power cannot snatch from you; a single mortal sin will suffice to despoil you of your precious birthright, change you from a child of God to a child of wrath, from an heir to the unending happiness of heaven to a victim of the endless misery of hell. Learn from this the folly of yielding to the temptations of the devil in the commission of mortal sin.

[1] Ephes. 1; 4.

3. WHAT CONSTITUTES THE GLORY OF HEAVEN.

"We are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him; because we shall see Him as He is." [1]

For the clearer understanding of your dignity it is necessary to indicate briefly what constitutes the glory of heaven, of which you are a true heir by reason of your adoption into the sonship of God. Heaven is the state of perfect and unalloyed bliss resulting from the permanent possession of what are known as Essential Glory and Accidental Glory. The former consists in the Beatific Vision. By this is meant that the human soul, by means of a very special gift known as the "Light of Glory" is enabled to *see* God, as He is, by a clear and unclouded perception of His Divine Essence. This new knowledge of God produces an immediate effect — *perfect love* — for, as it is impossible for iron not to become heated and softened when placed in a glowing furnace, so it is impossible for the soul to see God's beauty, and recognize His goodness and love for her, and not love Him in return with all her strength and all her power. The last element of this happiness is the *enjoyment* of God, by which the soul rejoices in the secure and endless possession of Him who is the Supreme Good. In possessing God, all the cravings of the soul for happiness are perfectly satisfied. These three elements of eternal happiness: sight or vision of God, enjoyment of God, and love of God, correspond to the three divine virtues

[1] 1 John 3; 2.

of faith, hope and charity, and shall be proportionate to the degree of perfection with which these virtues were practised in life.

As for Accidental Glory, it is impossible to enumerate all its constituent elements. We shall merely indicate a few of them: the soul shall be endowed with the fulness of knowledge of God's perfections and works; the risen and glorified body shall possess splendor, agility, subtility, impassibility (freedom from suffering) and immortality, like the glorified body of Jesus Christ; great joy will be derived from the companionship of the angels and saints (among the latter will be our relatives and friends), and in general, every legitimate craving for happiness shall be perfectly satisfied. Moreover, certain saints shall enjoy in addition a very particular glory, known as "Aureola," "the privileged reward of a privileged victory," as St. Thomas calls it. This is given to Virgins, Martyrs and Doctors. Among these last are included all who by word or writing teach others the truths of eternal salvation.

It must be remembered, however, that it is impossible for us in this life to form an adequate idea of the happiness of heaven. Comparisons with the pleasures of this life must utterly fail, for they belong to an entirely different order. As well might we try to judge of the beauty of a landscape by the faculty of hearing, or of the sweetness of honey by the sense of sight, as hope to form an idea of the supernatural joys of heaven by means of comparisons with the coarse pleasures of this natural life. All that we can do in this matter, is to believe firmly that "eye hath not

seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." [1]

4. YOUR TITLE TO A PARTICULAR SHARE OF THIS GLORY.

"Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." [2]

What has been said so far about your dignity as a child of God, and your consequent title to the perfect happiness of heaven should suffice to make you "mind the things that are above, and not the things that are upon the earth." Remember *you are destined for glory.* The thought, then, *"I am destined for heaven,"* should always be uppermost in your mind, become the motto of your life, and give direction to all your actions. As the fiery cloud led the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land, and the miraculous star brought the Magi to the stable of Bethlehem, so should the remembrance of your glorious destiny safely direct your steps in the long and painful wanderings through the desert of this earthly life to the promised land of eternal beatitude.

We must now proceed to the consideration of a point that concerns you most personally. You must know that while all who succeed in obtaining the reward of immortal glory, are endowed with perfect happiness, all do not enjoy the same kind and same degree of this happiness. As star differs from star in

[1] 1 Cor. 2; 9.
[2] 1 Cor. 3; 8.

beauty and luster, so does saint differ from saint in the splendor of celestial glory. The wonderful diversity in the beauty of natural objects is but a faint reflection of the still more wonderful diversity among the elect of God. One is the glory of the infant that dies after baptism, another that of a sinner who dies after a sincere death-bed conversion; one is the splendor of an ordinarily faithful soul, another that of a soul that has long practised an intense love for God, and spent itself in the heroic service of the sick and poor; one is the happiness of virgins, another that of confessors, another that of martyrs, still another that of apostles; while towering immeasurably above the combined splendors of all the angels and saints is the matchless glory of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God.*

* NOTE.— A familiar illustration will at least indicate how it is possible for the Saints to be perfectly happy, even though they differ greatly as to the kind and degree of their glory. Imagine a large number of vessels ranging from a small vial to a large reservoir filled with various liquids that differ greatly in value. When each vessel is filled to its utmost capacity, so that not another drop can be added, it may be said to be perfectly full. The vial and the reservoir are both perfectly full, yet the quantity contained by the latter may be several million times that of the former. So each saint will have a perfect measure of happiness. The liquids vary greatly in value; hence a small vessel containing a very costly liquid may exceed many times the value of a much larger vessel containing a liquid of inferior value. So each one of the saints in heaven possesses a special kind of glory. Suppose the reservoir contained not only the greatest quantity of liquid, but also the most precious kind; its value would then easily surpass that of all the other vessels combined. Apply this to the glory of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

5. YOUR PARTICULAR SHARE DETERMINED BY YOUR MERITS.

"He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly; and he who soweth in blessings, [abundantly], shall also reap in blessings." [1]

The question now suggests itself: "What determines the particular share of eternal glory that is awarded to every soul?" In answer to this it must be stated, that in the first place it depends on the special graces given her by Almighty God (for God is free in the distribution of His gifts); and in the second place on the soul's co-operation with these graces. God has ordained that every man's eternal happiness should be not only an inheritance, but also a *reward*, and this is to be exactly proportionate to the nature of the service he renders to his Maker. Hence every man is in reality the architect of his eternal fortune. His industry and perseverance in God's service will determine the precise amount of glory that will be awarded to him at the end of his life.

The manner in which God deals with men in this regard is made plain in the Parable of the Pounds as recorded in St. Luke. "A certain nobleman . . . called his ten servants and gave them ten pounds and said to them: Trade, till I come! And it came to pass that he returned and he commanded his servants to be called to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. And the first came and said: Lord, thy

[1] 2 Cor. 9; 6.

pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said: Well done, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful in a little, thou shalt have power over ten cities. And the second came, saying: Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said to him: Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying: Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin. . . . He said to him: Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Why didst thou not give my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have exacted it with usury (interest)? And he said to them that stood by: Take the pound away from him, and give it to him that hath ten pounds." (Luke 19).

In St. Matthew our Lord speaks of talents given to several servants. "A man going into a far country, called his servants, and delivered to them his goods. To one he gave five talents, to another two and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability;" and he commanded them to trade diligently until he should return and demand an account. By judicious investments the first two doubled the original amount, and were in consequence rewarded most munificently; "because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many; enter thou into the joy of thy lord!" The third servant, however, refused to comply with his lord's command; he went and buried his talent in the earth. For this failure to make a good use of his money he was punished most severely: "Cast out the unprofitable servant into exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25).

The application of these two instructive parables to your own case is easily made. You have received from Almighty God a pound or talent of infinite value, namely *Grace;* you are commanded to trade with it and increase it by the performance of good works and meritorious actions; and on the day of your death your eternal lot will be decided by the use you have made of it during your life.

Now in order to invest this valuable talent in a most profitable manner you must have an intense conviction of several very important truths. In the first place grace is of infinite value, and the very least degree of it is worth immeasurably more than all the material wealth of this earth; secondly, it is capable of unlimited increase, so that it may be doubled many times over, like a sum of money that is invested judiciously; thirdly, this increase is secured by the use of the sacraments and other means of grace, and by the performance of good works; fourthly, your whole life is so arranged by the loving Providence of God, that you have continually the most wonderful opportunities of making your talent yield the very largest returns, for He has ordained that under the influence of His grace every one of your good actions, when performed according to certain conditions, shall become the source of supernatural merits, which procure for you the particular degree of your future glory in heaven.

On His part, therefore, God has left nothing undone to enable you to reach an exalted degree of heavenly glory. It only remains for you to do what ordinary good sense dictates, namely to give yourself with single-minded and whole-souled devotion to the work of

rendering your grace fruitful of merits, so as to lay up as large as possible a store of those treasures that will minister to your perfect happiness for all eternity. Supposing, then, that you master the happy secret of loving God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind and your whole strength, and of sanctifying all your actions, great and small, so that your whole life becomes one continuous, uninterrupted act of the love of God, no human arithmetic will be able to calculate the vast amount of spiritual riches that you are sure to accumulate during the term of your probation here on earth.

Another motive to urge you to this complete dedication of all your powers to God's service is the unfailing assurance He has given you, that there is absolutely no comparison between your service here, and its reward hereafter. The difference between a tiny acorn to-day and a majestic oak a hundred years hence is not so great as that between a good work performed in time and its corresponding reward in eternity. "It hath not entered the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him," [1] and "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us." [2]

[1] 1 Cor. 2; 9.
[2] Rom. 8; 18.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF SUPERNATURAL MERIT.

1. NECESSITY OF ACCURATE KNOWLEDGE.

"And this I pray that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding, that you may approve the better things, . . . filled with the fruit of justice." [1]

One of the requisites for success in any business is a thorough acquaintance with all that relates to its proper management. A man who desires to become a prosperous jeweler must know the nature and value of his materials, must be able to distinguish between genuine articles and worthless imitations, and must be conversant with the laws and customs that govern his trade. He who would be a successful financier must continually be on the alert to seize favorable opportunities for lucrative investments, must know how to distinguish safe from unsafe ventures, and keep in touch with the fluctuations of the money-market; in one word — he must "know his business." Lack of necessary knowledge, and failure to adopt proper methods are bound to pave the way to certain and inevitable failure.

In a similar manner an accurate knowledge of the laws and conditions that govern your trade in things spiritual and supernatural is an indispensable

[1] Philip. 1; 9.

requisite for making lucrative investments with the talent of grace given you by Almighty God. The nature of this talent, its surpassing value, the kind of investments to be made, the interest to be gained, the various industries that will contribute towards a rapid increase of the original sum, even to the extent of doubling it over and over again — all these and other points claim the attentive study of a soul that has learned to form a true estimate of heavenly things and is determined to lay up the largest possible amount of treasure in heaven.

2. SUPERNATURAL MERIT.

"Be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." [1]

We must now proceed to the explanation of the word "merit" as used by the Church in reference to the gaining of eternal glory. In its ordinary acceptation the word merit denotes that property of a work which entitles the doer to receive a reward from him in whose service the work was done. Thus a laborer may be said to "merit" his day's or week's wages by the work he does for his employer. By a figure of speech the word merit has come to designate the work itself in as far as it deserves a reward from the person for whom it was performed.

In the supernatural order, merit denotes an act that is performed according to certain conditions laid down by God, and to which, in consequence of His infallible

[1] 1 Cor. 15; 58.

promise, He owes a supernatural reward, consisting in graces and other spiritual favors, and especially in the bestowal hereafter of what is known as "Life Eternal," namely the Beatific Vision and the perfect bliss resulting therefrom.

Merit is therefore twofold: natural and supernatural. Natural merit is the claim to a recompense in the natural order, such as good health, riches, prosperity and honors, and in general, things material and temporal. This kind of merit does not claim our attention in this treatise further than to define it. But supernatural merit, which is the subject under consideration, is, as already stated, a right or claim to a reward of the supernatural order, namely graces here and heavenly glory hereafter, which God gives without fail when we fulfill all the conditions necessary for gaining it.

3. CONDIGN MERIT AND CONGRUOUS MERIT.

"I have fought a good fight. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day." [1] "I say to you, that to every one that hath, [more] shall be given, and he shall abound." [2]

A distinction is made by theologians between what are known as Condign Merit and Congruous Merit. Merit is said to be *condign* (deserved, adequate, justly due), when it establishes a clear and undisputed claim to a just reward or recompense for a work done or a service rendered. This recompense must be given by

[1] 2 Tim. 4: 7.
[2] Luke 19; 26.

reason of a previous agreement, contract or promise. To withhold it would be an act of injustice. Now it is condign merit that is meant when we say that the glory of heaven is merited by our good works and meritorious actions. We do not, however, thereby assert, that our virtuous actions, even were they absolutely perfect, do of themselves confer on us a right or title to a supernatural or heavenly reward, but it is meant that we possess this claim simply because God in His infinite goodness and love has bound Himself by a solemn promise, in consideration of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, to bestow on us most magnificent rewards both here and hereafter, in proportion to the nature of the service we render Him. In virtue, therefore, of God's unfailing promise and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, we, in spite of our unworthiness acquire, by complying with certain conditions laid down by God, a positive claim and right to a supernatural recompense for our good works and meritorious actions. As the adopted children of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, and legitimate heirs of heaven, we are really able to merit condignly the crown of eternal life.

A reward is called *congruous* (fitting, becoming), when it is given, not by reason of previous contract or promise, but merely through the kindness, benevolence, generosity or liberality of the giver. Thus a noble-hearted employer will often give a liberal bonus, over and above the stipulated wages, to a faithful and industrious employee, not because such is the contract, but simply because he desires in this way to express his appreciation of devoted service. The wages which the

laborer receives according to the terms of the contract are merited condignly, *i. e.*, they are so justly his due, after he has fulfilled his part of the contract, that he can invoke the assistance of the civil law in case they are denied him; but the bonus which he receives at different times over and above his wages, is merited congruously. Propriety dictates that an employer should at times show his appreciation of faithful service by making donations to his subjects; but if he fails to give more than the wages agreed upon, he does not violate justice, nor wrong his employees.

In another place we shall treat of the rewards merited both condignly and congruously by our good works, so that we need not now dwell longer on this subject. Suffice it merely to remark that God's liberality in rewarding His faithful servants surpasses all expectation. No master is so generous, so liberal, so lavish and so intent on making his servants happy by means of rich and bountiful gifts as is the King of Heaven whom you are privileged to serve. Not only will He bestow on you an exceedingly great condign reward in the form of grace here and eternal glory hereafter, but He also lavishes on you continually, as congruous rewards, numberless benefits and favors to which you possess no claim whatever, but which He delights to give you simply because He loves you with an infinite and eternal love. Happy indeed will you be, if you lovingly surrender your whole being to His service, and thereby merit to receive the treasures of His grace "in a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."[1]

[1] Luke 6; 38.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANS OF SUPERNATURAL MERIT.

1. SANCTIFYING GRACE.

"If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [the grace of God], I am nothing." [1]

In every well-regulated commonwealth citizenship is a necessary condition for enjoying certain rights and privileges. Neither learning, nor wealth, nor prestige entitles a foreigner to those civil and political advantages, which even the poorest and meanest citizen possesses. Hence foreigners who desire to enjoy these same privileges, and wish to give legal stability to certain undertakings, must first acquire the right of citizenship according to the conditions established by the laws of the land.

We have a parallel in the supernatural order. There neither the most perfect natural endowments, science, knowledge, power, or glorious achievements, nor even the very highest degree of natural virtue, can confer on any man a right or title to the glory of heaven. A monarch who rules over an entire continent and is feared by millions of subjects may possess no claim whatever to the reward of the elect, while the poorest beggar in his realm may be entitled to a share equal to that of the highest seraph. The former, should

[1] 1 Cor. 13; 2.

he be in the state of mortal sin, is an object of God's wrath and a child of hell; the latter, if he is in the state of sanctifying grace, is God's well-beloved son and cherished friend, and ranks with the angels in princely dignity.

Whosoever, therefore, desires to labor successfully at acquiring supernatural merits, cannot afford to lose sight of the absolute necessity of being united with God by means of sanctifying grace, which alone confers on man the right of heavenly citizenship. But what is this sanctifying grace? It is a gratuitous, supernatural gift of God, given us in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, by which the soul is cleansed from sin, rendered holy and pleasing in the sight of God, endowed with a full and undisputed right to the enjoyment of heavenly glory, and enabled in this life to perform actions that are both acceptable to God and productive of supernatural merits. It must be borne in mind, however, that sanctifying grace as such is not of itself sufficient for the performance of meritorious actions — for this there is needed another grace, called actual grace,— but it is an indispensable prerequisite for the gaining of merit, just as life is necessary for human acts. It is also known as "habitual" grace, because it remains permanently in the soul, as life does in a living body, as long as it is not destroyed by mortal sin. Moreover, it is capable of indefinite growth and increase by means of the sacraments and good works; and the particular degree of increase that has been attained at the moment of death, will be the measure of the soul's eternal beatitude in heaven.

2. ACTUAL GRACE.

"It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will." [1]

Necessary as sanctifying grace is to the soul, it is not sufficient (except in the case of baptized infants that die before they come to the use of reason) for the maintenance of the supernatural life and the gaining of heavenly glory. As our natural life must be preserved and developed by those vital acts which are by nature ordained for this purpose, as eating, drinking, sleep, exercise, etc.; so too must the supernatural life be maintained by those acts which are calculated to preserve it and bring it to the proper degree of perfection. This is accomplished by our co-operation with actual grace in the performance of meritorious actions. A few words on each of these three points.

Actual Grace is an internal, supernatural help which enables us to do good and avoid evil. It operates in the soul in this manner:

(1.) It enlightens the understanding to see what ought to be done or avoided, and inclines the will toward what is good or averts it from evil. On this account it is called "exciting" grace and "preventing" * grace. It is called exciting grace because it rouses and invites us, as it were, to do good and avoid evil; and it is called preventing grace, because it is wholly the work of God in our souls and precedes

[1] Philip 2; 13.

* "Preventing" here means: going before, preparing; not, hindering, as it is now commonly used.

every deliberate and voluntary act of our own, as experience teaches us; for we feel these holy inspirations arise in us without anything done by us to procure them; or having it in our power to hinder their coming; though when they do come, we have it in our power to comply with them or to resist them.

(2.) When we freely comply with this first motion of actual grace it continues to fortify and strengthen us to finish the good work we have begun; and on this account it is called "concomitant" grace, because it accompanies us during the whole good action; and "strengthening" or "helping" grace, because it assists our weakness and enables us to perform the good work in the face of every obstacle.

For a just appreciation of the great value of actual grace it must be remembered that without it, we cannot, by our own natural strength, do the least thing towards our eternal salvation. It is utterly impossible to do anything supernaturally good, whether in thought, word or deed, without the aid of actual grace; and we cannot have so much as a good movement of our heart towards God, unless it be first excited by His grace. "Without me you can do nothing," is the plain declaration of our Lord, which admits of only one interpretation. It is very important to remember this great truth, for it is the foundation of true Christian humility, which is essentially necessary for a soul that desires to participate in God's benefits and graces.

Further it is necessary to know that *God bestows on all men grace in a measure sufficient to enable them to be saved.* If they take care to use these graces well, that is, co-operate with them in doing good, and

persevere in God's love, their eternal salvation is assured. Moreover, good use of the first graces is rewarded by the granting of new graces, so that fidelity in the use of grace is a certain means of arriving at a high degree of sanctity.*

Those, however, who for any reason refuse to employ actual grace as offered them by God, deliberately reject the *only* means that He has provided for the gaining of eternal life. If men are lost in consequence of their failure to co-operate with their graces, they have absolutely no one to blame but themselves. They have no more reason to complain of their eternal perdition than has a starving man to complain of the lingering and painful death he is suffering when through pride or false shame he refuses to eat the food that is offered him by a friendly hand.

3. CO-OPERATION WITH ACTUAL GRACE.

"And we helping do exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain." [1]

We have seen in the foregoing, how it is in our

* NOTE.—Attention is here drawn to the grace of Final Perseverance. By this is meant the continuance of the soul in the state of grace till the end of life. It is a grace that cannot be merited but depends solely on the goodness and liberality of God. To indicate its wholly gratuitous character it is called by theologians a "great gift." But though it cannot be merited, it can, as St. Alphonsus teaches, be infallibly obtained by faithful co-operation with grace during life and especially by means of earnest, humble and persevering prayer. God, "who will have all men to be saved," will not refuse this precious grace to those who earnestly pray for it.

[1] 2 Cor. 6; 1.

power either to co-operate with actual grace, inciting us to do a good action, or to refuse to comply with its promptings and first motions in our soul. Dreadful freedom, which decides for us our lot in eternity! It is a doctrine of faith, that actual grace, while so indispensably necessary, that without it we cannot do the least thing towards performing a meritorious work, nevertheless leaves man perfectly free either to use it or not to use it. In either case the results are tremendous. If we use it well, it will procure for us most magnificent benefits both in time and in eternity; if we neglect to use it, most serious consequences will be the result. The good use of grace is rewarded by the liberal bestowal of new graces; the abuse of grace is punished by the withholding of those future graces which depended on the first ones as links depend upon links in a chain; by a good use sanctifying grace is increased and a title to an additional reward in heaven is secured; while by a bad use that eternal reward which would infallibly have been acquired, had there been a generous correspondence with this most excellent of God's gifts, is eternally and irretrievably lost, like time that can never be recalled when once it has been wasted and squandered away.

Does not this convince you of the imperative necessity of always lending an attentive ear to the gentle whisperings of God's grace, urging you to avoid evil and do good, and of complying most generously with its promptings, even though the co-operation demanded should entail considerable inconvenience and self-denial and the sacrifice of personal gratifications? As we shall see later on, the benefits derived from the

good use of grace are incomparably greater than any earthly advantages whatsoever; hence a Christian who has his eye fixed on heaven should have but little difficulty in compelling himself to make the best possible use of the graces which God grants him so liberally for the sole purpose of enabling him to increase his store of merits here and his eternal happiness hereafter.

4. GOOD WORKS OR MERITORIOUS ACTIONS.

"Brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election." [1]

The fourth element necessary for the gaining of supernatural merit is the performance of good works, or, what amounts to the same, meritorious actions. As already explained, actual grace alone will not procure for the soul an increase of sanctifying grace; this is secured only by proper co-operation with actual grace in the performance of such acts as are good and pleasing in the sight of God.

Good works, as a means of obtaining eternal life, are indispensably necessary for a person that has attained the use of reason. Only infants that die before they arrive at the age of discretion are admitted to the vision of God in virtue of the sanctifying grace they possess; all others are obliged to *earn* their glory by the performance of good works. There is no alternative. Neither learning, nor natural goodness, nor extraordinary gifts, such as prophecy, or the

[1] 2 Pet. 1; 10.

power to work miracles, can purchase for a soul even the smallest degree of eternal glory. Hence he who neglects to do good works, cannot even expect to be saved. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," [1] writes St. James. And again he says: "What shall it profit, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Shall faith be able to save him? Faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. Thou believest there is one God. Thou dost well; the devils also believe and — tremble." [2]

But what is meant by good works as understood in connection with our subject? Are they actions that are great, striking and important in a worldly sense, or such as are difficult to perform? By no means. For if such were the case, comparatively few persons would be in a position to lay up a large store of supernatural merit, whereas it is God's most ardent desire that all men should accumulate the largest possible amount of this heavenly treasure. As the case stands, both the man of great intellectual culture, and the untutored, ignorant savage; the king on his throne and the beggar in his hovel; the statesman in the council-chamber and the mechanic amidst the ceaseless whir and din of the shop; — all without a single exception, have it in their power to perform daily a vast multitude of such actions as are meritorious in the sight of God, and entitle the soul to a high degree of glory hereafter.

Accordingly the expressions "good works" and

[1] James 1; 22.
[2] James 2; 14, 17, 19.

"meritorious actions" may be said to embrace every good thought, desire, word or action, that can form part and parcel of human activity, when performed in the state of sanctifying grace and from motives of the love of God. This is the teaching of St. Paul, when he writes: "All *whatsoever* you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," [1] and: "Whether you eat or drink, or *whatsoever* else you do, do all to the glory of God." [2]

A more extended explanation of this subject will be given later on when we speak of the causes of the difference of merit; for the present we would only remind the reader that according to the above definition our every-day life can be made an endless series of good works; secondly, that even the most ordinary life offers continual opportunities of richest merit, and thirdly, that no one, no matter how humble and obscure his position in this world may be, is handicapped in his endeavor to store up a large accumulation of treasure in heaven.

The knowledge of these points should give great consolation to souls that are aspiring to perfection and intimate union with God, and should stimulate them to unbounded generosity and untiring perseverance in His service. How easy God has made it for all to acquire an exalted degree of grace and glory! Does not this consoling truth deserve more attentive consideration than it usually receives? It is no exaggeration to say that a careful study of the easy ways and means of procuring a title to an exalted degree of

[1] Col. 3; 17.
[2] 1 Cor. 10; 31.

eternal glory would go far to make Christians apply themselves exclusively to those things that would cause them to "grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ," [1] and whereby "an entrance shall be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." [2]

CHAPTER IV

THE CONDITIONS OF SUPERNATURAL MERIT.

1. GENERAL CONDITIONS.

"Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name? And I will profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity." [3]

After having considered the nature and the means of supernatural merit, we must proceed to study another very important point in the doctrine of merit, namely the conditions that must be observed by all who desire to lay up treasure in heaven. As the words of our Lord in the text just quoted indicate, it is quite possible for us to labor indeed in God's service, but to labor fruitlessly and in vain. Hence the necessity of knowing and observing the conditions of merit.

In order that a good work may be entitled to a *condign* supernatural reward, certain conditions are

[1] 2 Pet. 3; 18. [2] 2 Pet. 1; 11. [3] Matt. 7; 22.

required on the part (1.) of the agent, (2.) of the work, and (3.) of God. On the part of the agent, *i. e.,* the person desiring to gain merit, it must be remembered that the opportunity of merit is limited to his life on earth, and that this opportunity ceases forever with his death; and in the second place, he must be in the state of sanctifying grace. On the part of the work it is required that it be (1.) free, *i. e.,* a conscious, deliberate action, and not one that is performed under compulsion or in the state of unconsciousness; (2.) good by nature, or, if naturally indifferent (*i. e.,* neither good nor bad in itself), that it be made good by a supernatural intention; and (3.) supernatural, *i. e.,* referred to God in some way, and performed in His honor and glory. On the part of God it is necessary that He should have given a promise to reward our good works.

In order that a good work may be *congruously* meritorious, it is necessary (1.) that it be performed during one's lifetime, as merit of all kind ceases with death; (2.) that it be good, and (3.) that it be a free act. The state of sanctifying grace is not essential. Examples of congruous merit or its corresponding reward we have in the temporal blessings which sinners and wicked men often receive in recompense of their naturally good works, or in the grace of faith given to pagans and infidels, or, again, in the grace of conversion and of a happy death granted to sinners in consideration of their charity to the poor or of some practice of devotion which they performed while in the state of mortal sin.*

* See the account of the conversion of Cornelius, Acts 10.—

It is not our purpose to explain all the conditions here enumerated, but only the more important ones, those namely which a person desiring to gain the largest possible amount of merit, must be careful to observe faithfully. But before treating of the conditions proper, we must make a few remarks about the source of our merits — the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

2. THE INFINITE MERITS OF JESUS CHRIST.

"Being rich, He became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might be rich." [1]

Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, is the author and source of all grace and merit. He alone could pay a sufficient price for supernatural grace; His works alone could merit an eternal recompense. Infinite love prompted Him to suffer and die for us, when we were helpless in our sins, and that same love urged Him to raise us from our low condition, and to make us His joint-heirs and rightful sharers of those infinite treasures of grace and merit which He acquired by His life, passion and death. As the eternal Son of God He has no need of these merits; He therefore made them over to us by a most generous legacy, to

"There was a certain man, named Cornelius, a religious man, and fearing God with all his house, giving much alms to the people, and always praying to God.— The angel said to him: Thy prayers and thy alms have ascended for a memorial in the sight of God." The grace of faith was granted him and his whole house.

[1] 2 Cor. 8; 9.

be used by us for our own sanctification. As a legally adopted child enjoys rights and privileges in the family similar to those of the natural children, so does a Christian, who by the grace of Baptism has been made an adoptive Son of God and joint-heir with Christ, become a full partaker in the infinite treasures of His divine grace.

By reason, then, of this divinely established union of the faithful with Jesus Christ, all their actions, prayers, and good works, when performed in the state of sanctifying grace and for the honor of God, receive a certain share in the value and efficacy of the actions of Christ. The Church, which He established for the salvation of mankind, is His mystical body; He is its head and they are its members and receive their spiritual vitality from Him. As long then as a Christian remains united with Him by grace, his good works become meritorious of eternal life. He resembles a branch on a good vine; the life-giving sap passes from the trunk into the remotest branches and makes them produce an abundance of sweet and delicious fruit.

Meditate often on these consoling truths; they will make your heart glow with ardent love of Jesus Christ and tender gratitude for His infinite goodness. Strive earnestly to understand and realize that you are brought into the closest and most intimate union with Him; that His rights, graces and merits actually become yours; that you are transformed into His likeness and that for His sake the Eternal Father treats you and loves you as His favorite and well loved child. Endeavor by your fidelity to your divine Savior to make it possible for Him to say to you:

"The Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved me." [1]

3. GOD'S PROMISE.

"Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." [2] "Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to his works." [3]

The infinite goodness of God yearns for the eternal salvation and happiness of all men. Far from desiring the eternal perdition of any man, "He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." [4] For this reason He has made it possible for all to obtain the full possession of their eternal inheritance, provided they are willing to comply with the conditions of salvation. "Jesus Christ became to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation." [5] But take particular notice of the condition "*that obey Him*," for there is no denying the fact that all who proudly refuse to obey God's will in this matter can expect no grace and mercy in this life (as long as they continue in these dispositions), nor salvation and heavenly glory in the next. There is no escape from this truth, however distasteful it may be to men that are slaves to pride and other unruly passions. Men must win the endless glory of heaven on God's terms, not on theirs. What employer will retain a servant that presumes to dictate terms of service? And if such a servant persists in working contrary to his

[1] John 16; 27.
[2] Matt. 5; 12.
[3] Apoc. 22; 12.
[4] 1 Tim. 2; 4.
[5] Heb. 5; 9.

master's will and command, is he entitled to a remuneration? How then can we expect that man, who is but dust and ashes, should venture to dictate terms of service to God, and lay down conditions of reward? These considerations should disabuse those who think they are in the way of salvation as long as they "do what they think is right," without entering the Church of Jesus Christ.

To all, however, who realize that "to serve God is to reign," and hence strive to render Him a filial and devoted service of faith, hope and love, God has given a solemn promise, and bound Himself by this promise, to grant them for the love and through the merits of Jesus Christ, most bountiful and transcendent rewards both in time and eternity. "Blessed are you — for yours is the kingdom of heaven." [1] "Rejoice in this that your names are written in heaven." [2] "Do good, . . . and your reward shall be great: and you shall be sons of the Highest." [3] "In my Father's house are many mansions: . . . I go to prepare a place for you." [4] Such are the sweet and gracious promises He makes to all who humbly submit to His adorable will, and render Him a generous and child-like service. And the reward promised is in every way in keeping with His infinite love, goodness and power. Let us take it on faith that no mortal man can have the faintest idea of the magnificence of the recompense granted in heaven for even the smallest work performed on earth for the love of God.

[1] Matt. 5.
[2] Luke 10; 20.
[3] Luke 6; 35.
[4] John 14; 2.

4. THE STATE OF SANCTIFYING GRACE.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without me and you can do nothing." [1]

As already observed, one of the conditions of supernatural merit on the part of the agent, is the *state of sanctifying grace,* or freedom from mortal sin. So absolutely necessary is this condition that to overlook it would spell complete failure in the attempt to gain supernatural merits. It is not enough to do good, even if the love of God is the motive; *sanctifying grace is indispensably necessary* if you wish to make your good works productive of a heavenly reward.

Hence always bear in mind this truth: *It is utterly impossible for you to gain condign supernatural merits, as long as you live in the state of mortal sin.**

The reason is this: A soul in mortal sin does not possess the supernatural life of grace; hence is not supernaturally united with Jesus Christ. Now as in the physical order, a body, from which life has fled, cannot perform a vital action, or a branch, which is torn

[1] John 15; 5.

* NOTE.— All non-Catholics, who *know* that the Catholic Church is the divinely appointed means of salvation, but refuse to join her for any reason whatsoever, are living in the state of mortal sin — resisting the known truth — and hence cannot gain any condign supernatural merits by their good works. If they die in this sin, they are lost, just the same as other sinners who die with unforgiven mortal sins on their soul. "He that believeth not shall be condemned." [2] "He that believeth not is already judged." [3] The good works of such persons are entitled to no more than a congruous reward.

[2] Mark 16; 16.

[3] John 3; 18.

from the tree cannot by any possibility bear fruit; or, as in the civil order, the actions of a criminal, whom the courts have declared civilly dead, have no value before the law, so too in the supernatural order a soul, that is separated from Jesus Christ by mortal sin, cannot gain condign supernatural merits by her good works, be these ever so excellent and ever so numerous. "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, . . . and have not charity (grace, love of God), it profiteth me nothing."[1] Only those works which are performed in grace are meritorious.

GOOD WORKS PERFORMED IN THE STATE OF MORTAL SIN.

"Master, we have labored all the night and have taken nothing."[2]

All the time spent in the state of mortal sin is therefore forever and irretrievably lost as far as eternal merit in heaven is concerned. But does this imply that such works are devoid of all reward? By no means. On the contrary, the infinite justice of God will leave no good action without its proper recompense, but this recompense can never be condign and eternal; it can at most be a congruous and temporal one. It usually consists in temporal blessings; but often too in spiritual favors, such as the grace of timely conversion from sin, and especially of dying in the grace of God. The great truth, however, that you must never lose sight of is this: *There is no*

[1] 1 Cor. 13; 3. [2] Luke 5; 5.

possibility of gaining the glory of heaven as long as the soul is in mortal sin.

A FEW INSTRUCTIVE ILLUSTRATIONS.

"The hope [of sinners] is vain, and their labors without fruit, and their works unprofitable." [1]

The extreme folly of living in mortal sin and hence in a state of inability to gain eternal rewards, will appear more strikingly from a few illustrations.

(1.) An infidel, or a pagan, or a Catholic who lived all his life in mortal sin, dies after a sincere death-bed conversion. Such a one is saved indeed, but as his life was devoid of supernatural merits, his glory in heaven will differ but little from that of infants that die after baptism.

(2.) A sinner dies repentant at the age of seventy, after spending, let us say, fifty years of his life in mortal sin. Supposing that his childhood and youth were spent in grace, his reward in heaven will extend only to those early years, together with the short time that elapsed between his conversion and the moment of his death. He is saved; but fifty years of his life are a blank before God as far as heavenly merit is concerned.

(3.) Another has for fifty years been in the habit of living in mortal sin eleven months out of the twelve. Granted that one month of each year was spent in grace, his reward in heaven will extend to a period of only a little over four years, while more than forty-five years are without merit.

[1] Wisd. 3; 11.

These few examples of simple arithmetic applied to spiritual gains and losses ought to convince you of the insanity of those who deliberately continue in the state of mortal sin. We cannot imagine that they would pursue a similar course in worldly or commercial affairs. Would not a man be unanimously condemned for his folly, if by wilful and deliberate failure to comply with certain legal conditions in business, he were to forfeit as much time and its corresponding pecuniary profits coming from a lucrative investment, as many Christians forfeit continually in point of grace and supernatural merit? Truly, "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Are you, dear Reader, at this moment perhaps living in the sad state of mortal sin, in which it is impossible for you to "lay up treasure in heaven," and yet manifest not the least concern or regret at the heavy losses you are sustaining? Do you not know, that the smallest fraction of the precious time that you may have squandered in the past would have emptied hell of its unhappy victims, had that brief moment been given them for repentance? Learn to be wise and make the most of your opportunities for the future.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND PERFECT CONTRITION.

"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."[1]
"Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much."[2]

If you are convinced of the absolute necessity of

[1] Matt. 9; 2. [2] Luke 7; 47.

being in the state of sanctifying grace in order to gain supernatural merits, you will not fail to receive the Sacrament of Penance as promptly as possible should you at any time have the misfortune to commit a mortal sin. And more than this. You must not overlook the fact that you are able to regain the state of grace long before you may have an opportunity to confess your sin. An act of *Perfect Contrition,* with the sincere resolution to confess as soon as convenient, will immediately procure for you the pardon of your sin, restore grace to your soul and thus enable you again to acquire supernatural merits. Though weeks and months may pass before an opportunity of confession can be found, you need not live in the state of mortal sin for even the space of a quarter of an hour. One act of perfect contrition will instantaneously produce its salutary effects in your soul, and re-establish the condition required for the gaining of merit.

HOW TO MAKE ACTS OF PERFECT CONTRITION.

"O God, be merciful to me a sinner! — I say to you, this man went down to his house justified." [1]

Happily for the unfortunate sinner, it is not so difficult to make acts of perfect contrition, as is commonly, but erroneously, believed. A heartfelt, interior, supernatural sorrow, springing from the love of God, in as much as the infinitely good God, our most loving Father, our kindest Friend and our highest Good has been offended, insulted, and outraged by the sinful

[1] Luke 18; 13.

action, together with a firm resolve not to commit it again, constitutes the essence of perfect contrition. It must be remembered that this contrition is not a physical sorrow, nor a thing of the feelings or of sentiment, but it is chiefly an act of the will, by which the sinner regrets, deplores, detests and retracts, as far as he can, the evil he has done; at the same time making the firm resolution to avoid the sin in the future, and to make the necessary reparation to God's justice.

No particular form of words is required, though it may be useful to recite slowly, thoughtfully and earnestly the ordinary act of contrition; nor is it necessary to spend a fixed length of time in making such acts. Any devout and fervent invocation, such as: "My Jesus, Mercy!" may contain all the necessary elements of perfect sorrow and perfect love, which will instantly blot out sin, and restore the soul to the love and friendship of God.

Moreover God never refuses the grace that is essentially necessary for perfect contrition, if it is asked for with the requisite earnestness and sincerity, for He does not desire the death of the sinner, but ardently longs for his speedy repentance and reconciliation. Hence the graces necessary for making an act of perfect sorrow will invariably be granted to those who address themselves to Him in humble prayer.*

* NOTE.— The pious practice of frequently making acts of contrition is of incalculable value and importance to souls that are striving after perfection. (1) It helps to cancel the punishment due to past sins; (2) it cleanses the soul from venial sins, into which she falls continually; (3) it is an antidote against future sins; (4) it keeps alive the fire of repentant love; (5) it nourishes the virtues of penance and mortifica-

5. SUPERNATURAL INTENTION.

"Take heed to yourselves, that you do not your justice before men to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven." [1]

Another condition of supernatural merit, which demands careful consideration is the intention that governs and directs your actions. Your intention in doing a good work may be either supernatural, natural or sinful. In order to acquire a claim to a heavenly reward you must act from supernatural motives, *i. e.,* you must have God in view when you act. This intention must be directed to Him in some way: either explicitly, *i. e.,* by a special or particular act of intention, or at least implicitly, by virtue of a previous good intention not retracted by an intention to the contrary or destroyed by the commission of a mortal sin.

Too much stress cannot be laid on the *necessity* of animating your good works with the right kind of intention, because its character determines in a great measure the meritoriousness of your actions. If it is supernatural and pure, *i. e.,* directed solely to the honor, glory and love of God, even your most trivial and insignificant actions may acquire a very high degree of meritoriousness. But if you allow yourself to act from motives that are natural, such as convenience, personal satisfaction, reputation, human applause or the like, your works, even the best, will not receive from God the reward you may flatter

tion, and thereby (6) becomes the fertile soil of every other Christian virtue. Accustom yourself often to make such acts!

[1] Matt. 6; 1.

yourself to have gained; and if this intention should happen to be a sinful one, such as vanity, envy, pride or revenge, even your most excellent works would not only become worthless before God, but also deserving of punishment.

WONDERFUL INFLUENCE OF THE INTENTION.

"If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome, but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome." [1]

It is, therefore, the quality of the intention that determines largely whether or not you will gain supernatural merit by means of a good work, and also whether this merit will be great or small. (We are here considering the influence of the intention only; for other causes of the difference of merit see Chap. VI). Thus, for example, a hundred persons assist at the same Mass. Were it given us to know the results in each case, we should certainly be astonished at the great diversity of fruits derived from one and the same work. We might find that where one man gained a certain amount of merit, another gained twice as much; a third five times, a fourth ten times, a fifth a hundred times as much, and so on in ever increasing ratio. But we might also discover that some gained no condign supernatural merit whatever, because they were in mortal sin, or because their intention was vitiated by unworthy motives; and again some may have rendered themselves guilty of punishment because they were actuated by sinful intentions, which rendered the good action sinful in the sight of God.

[1] Matt. 6; 22.

Hence never lose sight of the importance of the proper intention, but always aim resolutely at doing all your actions solely for the love, honor and glory of God, and your reward in heaven shall be exceedingly great.

CHAPTER V

THE RICH REWARDS MERITED BY GOOD WORKS.

1. GOD'S LIBERALITY IN REWARDING GOOD WORKS.

"Give and it shall be given you; good measure and pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall they give into your bosom." [1]

It is impossible to realize how exceedingly generous God is in rewarding the good works which we perform in His service during the term of our probation here on earth. Each and every virtuous action, even the smallest, receives from His infinite goodness surpassingly rich rewards which form the Christian's most substantial wealth and will minister to his perfect happiness for all eternity. This recompense is infallibly granted to him, provided he fulfills conscientiously these two conditions: (1.) to keep himself in the state of sanctifying grace, and (2.) to always act from motives of the love of God.

We shall now consider the several fruits that make up the entire reward merited by a good work. These

[1] Luke 6; 38.

are five in number; namely: (1.) Increase of sanctifying grace in the soul; (2.) Remission of temporal punishment; (3.) Impetration or Intercession; (4.) Actual graces; and (5.) Increase of eternal glory in heaven.

2. FIRST FRUIT: INCREASE OF SANCTIFYING GRACE.

"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." [1]

The first fruit, or partial reward, merited by every good work, no matter how small, trifling or insignificant it may be, is an increase of the sanctifying grace which the soul possesses at the time the work is done. A few illustrations borrowed from nature will help to make this more easily understood.

All are familiar with the growth and development that goes on in our physical life. Life varies greatly in degrees of fulness, intensity and perfection in the infant, the child, the youth and the full-grown man. In a similar manner, sanctifying grace, which is our spiritual life, passes through various stages of development and perfection in the soul of a Christian. Man's natural life is maintained and perfected by the air he breathes, the food he eats, the labor he performs and the bodily exercise he takes; his supernatural life, under the influence of actual grace, grows, expands and increases with every act that is supernaturally good. A tree grows by reason of the nourishing elements it absorbs from the soil and the

[1] 2 Pet. 3; 18.

air; similarly grace grows with every supernaturally good action. A sum of money necessarily increases with every deposit, however small; grace increases with every meritorious work, however trifling.

This last comparison is particularly instructive, in as much as it shows strikingly how increase in sanctifying grace can go on indefinitely, and has no fixed limits, as long as life endures. The human body begins to decline as soon as it has attained its natural limit of development; a tree will decay and disappear after it has grown to certain proportions; but a sum of money may go on increasing indefinitely, either by accumulation of interest or by simple deposits, until it may exceed the collective wealth of an entire kingdom. And the larger and the more numerous the individual deposits are, and the higher the rate of interest, the more rapid will be the increase of the original sum.

This is a fair illustration of what you may accomplish in your spiritual life. You can continue uninterruptedly to grow in grace up to the moment when your soul quits your body; and even though you possessed at this moment the grace of a seraph, you can still continue to increase in it, and this increase will correspond exactly to the number and kinds of your good works.

Another point must be touched upon in this connection. The degree of God's love for you at any given moment is determined by the particular degree of sanctifying grace you possess at that moment, and grows proportionately to your increase in this grace. Now we know that a soul having the very low-

est degree of sanctifying grace, is loved by Him with an altogether inexpressible tenderness; how intensely then must He love you, after you have spent many years, perhaps your whole life, in the steady practice of virtue and holiness, and the diligent performance of all kinds of meritorious actions?

3. SECOND FRUIT: REMISSION OF TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT.

"Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold; for alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting." [1]

The second fruit of a meritorious action is its power to cancel a part, or even the whole, of the temporal punishment incurred by the commission of sin. It would be a most deplorable mistake, if ever you were to forget, or make light of, the truth, that every sin, even the smallest, is necessarily and infallibly followed by its proportionate punishment, and that this punishment must be cancelled entirely before the soul can be admitted into the presence of God in the Kingdom of His glory.

Now this atonement of satisfaction may be made by you in this life, or must be made in the next. There is no escape from this hard truth. If you have sinned much, either by mortal sin, or many venial sins, or perhaps both, you have every reason to fear that a large debt of punishment may be standing written against you. In view of this condition of things,

[1] Tob. 12; 8.

it must surely be the source of immense consolation to appreciate fully that the assiduous performance of good works enables you to cancel this debt, which, by the way, may be vastly larger than you are prepared to admit. More consoling still is the thought that by fervor in God's service now you may succeed in doing in a very short time, what the merciless flames of purgatory might not be able to accomplish in many years.

But there is still another advantage to be considered. You are able, as long as life lasts, both to make atonement for past sins, and to gain new merits for heaven at one and the same time; whereas in purgatory atonement only can be made. There you will no longer be able to merit even the smallest degree of grace or glory, no matter how prolonged and excruciating your pains may be, for, as has been pointed out, the power of acquiring merit is limited to man's life on earth.

The keen appreciation of these several truths should exert a far-reaching influence on your whole life. Not only should it impel you to do all the good that you can do, as long as God gives you life, but it should also make you a model of resignation and patience, when you are tried by crosses and afflictions of various kinds. The realization of the fact, that even the most intense pain that it is possible for human nature to endure, bears no comparison with the smallest pain endured by the souls in purgatory, will of necessity make you prefer to suffer in this life, where you enjoy at one and the same time the advantage of both satisfying for your sins and gaining abundant merits for greater glory in heaven.

4. THIRD FRUIT: IMPETRATION OR INTERCESSION.

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and His ears unto their prayers." [1]

The power of impetration or intercession with God is the third fruit of meritorious actions. A soul in the lowest degree of grace is God's favorite and is cherished by Him with a fatherly tenderness. He cannot help loving her, any more than a magnet can refuse to attract steel or the sun to diffuse light and heat. Of such a soul, which by grace bears the image and likeness of Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Father says: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." [2]

One of the ways in which God delights to manifest His love for a soul in the state of grace is to hear her prayers and grant her petitions for graces and favors. There is a very beautiful and consoling passage in the gospel of St. John, which we should often recall in pious meditation, for it reveals to us in unmistakable language the tenderness of God's love for His children. "In that day," our Blessed Savior assures us, "you shall ask in my name, and I say not to you, that I will ask the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved me." [3] Could we expect to discover anywhere a more consoling assurance of God's immense love? This love constrains Him to shower His choicest blessings on

[1] Ps. 33; 16. [2] Matt. 3; 17. [3] John 16; 26.

those who surrender themselves to His service, and to promote in every way their temporal and eternal interests.

From what was said about the first fruit — increase of grace — it is easy to see that God's readiness and willingness to hear your petitions and grant your requests must increase with your growth in grace, or, which amounts to the same thing, with your growth in the love of God; and since every meritorious action augments this love in your soul, it is plain that good works possess all the efficacy of a silent but very powerful prayer.

This goes a great way in explaining the wonderful power of intercession which the Saints of God possessed in life. It was perhaps more by reason of their great sanctity acquired by the performance of many virtuous actions, than on account of the particular prayers offered for special intentions, that God granted them so many favors and worked so many miracles through them. If you strive to render yourself agreeable to God in the same way, you, too, will be able to obtain whatever is for your good and His glory.

5. FOURTH FRUIT: ACTUAL GRACES.*

"He that is good shall draw grace from the Lord." [1]

"God is love," writes the Beloved Disciple. Love is communicative; it seeks to manifest itself in action. As the material sun never ceases to dispense to our globe the benefits of light, heat and chemical action,

* NOTE.—Merited congruously, not condignly.

[1] Prov. 12; 2.

by which all living things are sustained, so God never ceases to dispense to all men every kind of both material and spiritual blessings, which are intended to promote their eternal interests. No one is excepted; all, even the most wicked, share in His gifts. But if He is so liberal in giving good things to those who disobey, hate and reject Him, how lavish must He not be to those who study to render Him a devoted service of childlike love! He not only grants to these all necessary temporal blessings, according to His promise: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things (necessary for life) shall be added unto you," [1] but also bestows on them a copious supply of actual graces, by means of which they are enabled to make rapid strides in the path of virtue and perfection, and thus increase most wonderfully their treasure in heaven.*

What has been said in a former section about the nature and the necessity of actual grace will reveal to you the great value of this fourth fruit of good

[1] Matt. 6; 33.

* NOTE.—Temporal blessings are given by God in that measure in which He knows them to be useful and beneficial to the soul. A soul that realizes the truth that God lovingly disposes all things for the best interests of His servants, understands that sickness, poverty, afflictions, persecutions, etc., which often seem to be inflicted more heavily on the good and virtuous, than on the wicked, are not real evils, but rather blessings in disguise. In place of a very moderate amount of merit they would gain, if they were free from these trials, they will earn an "exceeding weight" of glory, simply because they are thus afflicted. Every cross is a special proof and token of God's love, who thereby seeks to promote the greater glory of His elect. Always consider the cross a means of greater glory.

works. We must never forget that without actual grace it is *utterly impossible for us to begin, continue or finish the least thing that is supernaturally meritorious.* We are totally dependent on this grace, no matter how excellent our natural gifts and qualities may be, just as an engine, no matter how perfect in construction, depends upon steam or some other motive power to make it do work. Strive, then, by the untiring practice of good works of every kind to render yourself deserving of a copious supply of actual graces, that through these you may reach the very highest attainable degree of sanctity and Christian Perfection.

6. FIFTH FRUIT: INCREASE OF ETERNAL GLORY IN HEAVEN.

"Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." [1]

The four partial rewards explained so far are doubtless very precious, and of inestimable value to a soul that prizes heavenly things according to God's standards of valuation. Increase of grace, atonement, impetration and actual graces are of immeasurably greater value to a man of faith, than gold and silver and precious stones are to the most avaricious miser. But there is still another fruit, perhaps the most excellent — certainly the most enduring — namely: Increase of glory in heaven. Each and every one of your good actions, if performed according to the con-

[1] 1 Cor. 2; 9.

ditions of merit, besides the above fruits, will infallibly be rewarded by its own corresponding increase of heavenly glory.

Glory in heaven! What mortal man can have the faintest idea of the full meaning of these three words! All that the human heart can possibly desire is contained in this reward. Nay more. The beatified soul, and after the general resurrection, the glorified body as well, will be endowed with new capabilities of enjoyment, of which we have not the slightest conception in this life. It would be a foolish undertaking, therefore, to attempt anything like a description of that unspeakable happiness, with which God rewards His faithful children. Indeed, it would sooner be possible for a man born blind to paint for us in true colors the delicate tints of the rainbow or the ever-changing beauties of the Falls of the Niagara, than for us to trace even in faintest outline the magnificence of the reward prepared hereafter for God's elect. Even if we were favored, as was St. Paul, with a vision of heaven, words would fail us should we attempt to describe our experience, and with him we should have to say: "I saw things which it is not given to man to utter." "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered the heart of man what things God has prepared for them that love Him."

But in order on the one hand to point out more fully the impossibility of forming an adequate idea of heaven, and on the other, to strengthen our faith in the unseen beauty and happiness of God's eternal kingdom, we shall consider somewhat at length a

man's relation to the beauties of this material world, when he is lacking the sense of sight.

Try to picture to yourself the sad and pitiable condition of a man afflicted with lifelong total blindness. For him the sun never rises to illumine and render visible the countless beauties of the universe; a long tedious night of perpetual and impenetrable darkness hides from his view all the marvels of God's natural creation; and though he were placed in the midst of the most charming scenery that could be found on this earth, he could derive absolutely no pleasure from his surroundings. Flowers, trees, birds, animals, the creations of human ingenuity, in one word, all the things that would necessarily fill your heart with gladness and delight, would have no power to afford the least satisfaction to this unfortunate man. And because he had never looked upon a single material object, had never seen a plant, or tree, or river, or mountain, or works of art, or the phenomena of nature and, above all, the beauty of the human countenance, he could not possibly have anything like a correct idea of the shape, size, color, etc., of the myriads of things that make up this beautiful world.

Still his blindness would not necessarily hinder him from knowing that these objects really exist and are endowed with great beauty. From conversation with his friends he may acquire a fairly complete knowledge of them, so that he may be able to explain in technical terms the movements of the heavenly bodies in space, or the formation of the rainbow, or the geological history of the Rocky Mountains, or of the Falls of the Niagara, and though it has never been his

good fortune to look upon these things, his explanation of them may be perfectly correct.

Let us now suppose that after many years of total blindness this poor man were to receive the gift of sight in a miraculous manner. What astonishing revelations would meet his wondering eye wherever he turned! How totally different would he find the reality of things to be from the crude and clumsy ideas he had formed of them heretofore! And how many things, of which he had never heard, and whose existence he could not even surmise or imagine, would now force themselves on his attention at every step! A new world with a thousand marvels would be thrown open to him. We fancy this miraculous reception of the gift of sight would make him the happiest of mortals.

We may now proceed to make the application. In regard to the supernatural beauty of heaven we are in every respect like a man who is blind to the beauties of this natural world. A blind man cannot possibly form a correct idea of the wonders of God's physical world; we cannot even in outline picture to ourselves the infinitely greater wonders of His supernatural creation. A blind man may acquire a fairly accurate knowledge of many things in nature, by listening to instructions given him by his friends; we can acquire, through the teachings of our holy faith, an extensive knowledge of truths regarding the glory of heaven; *e. g.,* that this glory consists in the vision, enjoyment and love of God; that every soul will receive a share of glory proportionate to her merits; that both soul and body will be glorified; that

this glory will endure forever, etc. A blind man cannot enjoy the beauties of this natural world until he receives the gift of sight by means of a cure; the human soul cannot see God and delight in His beauty until a special gift, the Light of Glory, is communicated to her at the moment of admission into heaven.

May this illustration serve to strengthen your faith in the surpassing beauty and grandeur of the glory prepared for you in God's eternal kingdom. Often meditate on the twelfth article of the Creed: "I believe in life everlasting," and remember always that its joys must necessarily surpass your highest expectations. The happiness of a blind man at the reception of perfect sight bears no comparison whatever with the happiness that will fill your soul when the Light of Glory will be given you, that thenceforth and forever you may feast your eyes and heart on God's transcendent beauty, which is "ever ancient and ever new."

7. PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

"O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee!"[1]

In view of the consoling truths you have learned about the wonderful generosity with which God rewards your good works, is there any need of suggesting that you take some very determinate and practical resolutions that will cover the rest of your life? Surely you must now at least be fully convinced that God yearns with infinite yearnings to raise you to the high-

[1] Ps. 30; 20.

est degree of glory attainable with the measure of grace given you, and that He has your very best interests deeply at heart. Has He not given you all the means that are necessary to secure your eternal salvation, so that it merely depends on your willing co-operation with His loving intentions whether you will receive a large or a small share of your eternal inheritance?

You recite, for example, a short prayer,— the work of a moment,— you endure a pain, and render a kind service to a neighbor. Here are three actions, small in themselves, but if performed properly, each is productive of these five rewards: increase of grace, remission of temporal punishment, power of intercession with God, a new supply of actual graces, and finally a proportionate increase of glory in heaven. Now if every single good work carries with it such abundant rewards, how astoundingly large and immeasurably vast must be the collective rewards of the millions of meritorious actions you can easily perform in your life time? Did you ever reflect on these things before?*

* NOTE.—Of these five fruits the first and the last are inalienable; *i. e.,* they are so strictly your own property, that you could not (if you wished) give them up in favor of another. Once merited, they cannot be taken from you, if you do not commit a mortal sin. Mortal sin destroys all previous merit, but through God's goodness, lost merit is restored when the sin is forgiven. But there is no condign supernatural merit gained, while a person lives in the state of mortal sin. The second fruit — atonement — you may give to others, *e. g.,* to the souls in purgatory. Many persons make the "Heroic Act," by which they donate, through the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the suffering souls all the atonement they

Besides, you must remember, that in such a vast multitude of meritorious actions not a single one will be overlooked, forgotten, or left unrewarded in eternity. God is not willing that you forfeit even the least degree of glory to which you have acquired a just title, and you can confidently say with St. Paul: "I know whom I have believed (trusted), and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day" (of eternity).[1]

Learn from this, dear Reader, to take a right view of your life, and to appreciate your opportunities! Are not the actions that fill up even the shortest life so multitudinous that it would be folly to attempt counting them? As well attempt to count the stars in the firmament and the grains of sand on the seashore, as to number the actions of your life! What a source of consolation to a soul that has fixed her affections in heaven, to realize fully that all of them, not one excepted, can under the influence of divine grace, become the source of increased glory hereafter.

As long as life lasts you can go on praying, working and suffering for the love of God; you can uninterruptedly practise the virtues of faith, hope and charity: you have countless occasions for doing kind acts towards your neighbor; you can continually exercise yourself in humility, meekness, patience, self-

merit by their good works in this life, as well as the suffrages that will be offered for them after death. This is an act of great charity, and hence of immense benefit to the generous donors. The third fruit — intercession — may be used for the benefit of others and charity dictates you should thus employ them. The fourth fruit is your personal property.

[1] 2 Tim. 1; 12.

denial, and perfect conformity to the will of God in all the adverse and painful events of life; you can easily — it requires only a little reflection and a good will — by the magic influence of the proper intention make every step you take, every breath you draw, every word you speak and every duty you perform, part and parcel of one continuous and unbroken act of the purest love of God, that will flow on, like a mighty river, with ever-increasing depth and volume, until it is lost in the boundless ocean of endless felicity in your heavenly Father's eternal kingdom. "In doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing." [1]

CHAPTER VI

THE CAUSES OF THE DIFFERENCE OF MERIT.

1. DIFFERENCE OF MERIT.

"Verily, I say to you that this poor widow has cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast into the offerings of God, but she of her want has cast in all the living she had." [2]

It has been pointed out, that under proper conditions every good work becomes the source of exceedingly rich rewards. Now it may be asked: Does the amount of merit gained ever vary, or is it acquired according to a fixed scale, as in the case of workmen, who all receive the same amount of wages per hour, even though some are more industrious than others? Or, is it possible that a person may gain more at one

[1] Gal. 6; 9. [2] Luke 21; 3.

time than at another by the performance of the same good work? The answer is easy. There exists a difference of merit, and, as we shall see presently, this difference may be very great. Of two persons doing the same work, the one may gain a hundredfold more than the other; he, who performs a very ordinary action, in secret and known to God alone, may merit immensely more than another who accomplishes a deed of heroism, that elicits the applause of an admiring multitude; a man who is hindered from assisting at Mass may by his ardent desire gain vastly more merit than some of those who actually assist, or even the priest who offers it; a poor man who gives only a nickel for charity may make God his debtor more than a man of wealth who contributes a thousand dollars, and — to make an end — some souls will make giant-strides in the path of holiness and lay up a vast store of heavenly merit in a very short space of time, as was the case with St. Aloysius and other youthful saints; while others make rather slow progress, and after a long term of years possess only a moderate amount of such spiritual treasures.

It shall be our aim in this section to explain the causes that determine this difference in the amount of merit to be gained by our good works. They may be reduced to seven in number, namely: (1.) The particular degree of sanctifying grace; (2.) The intrinsic excellence of the good work; (3.) Purity and fervor of intention; (4.) Frequent renewal of the intention; (5.) The number of good works; (6.) The difficulties encountered; and (7.) The state of life.

2. FIRST CAUSE: THE PARTICULAR DEGREE OF SANCTIFYING GRACE.

"Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents; behold, I have gained other five, over and above: Lord, thou didst deliver unto me two talents; behold, I have gained other two." [1]

The first cause of the difference of merit must be sought in the particular amount of sanctifying grace possessed by him who performs a meritorious work. The greater the grace, the more meritorious the work. A few familiar illustrations will aid us in making this point clear. That truly wonderful gift which is known as Life, is indeed possessed by all living persons, but in various degrees of perfection. It varies in the infant, the boy, the youth and the full grown man. But as it passes through all the stages of natural development, beginning in the helplessness of infancy and attaining its fullest perfection in the maturity of manhood, a man's various forms of activity in the natural, civil and moral order become continually more numerous, more intense, more effective and more far-reaching in their consequences.

There is a wonderful parallel in the supernatural life of man. When he is made a child of God in the sacrament of Baptism, he is endowed with all that is implied in the term "Sanctifying Grace." He receives a clear title to the sonship of God, to the participation in the Divine Nature and to the glory of heaven. But growth and development are a law of the spiritual, as well as of the natural life; and,

[1] Matt. 25; 20; 22.

as explained in a former chapter, grace, under favorable conditions, may grow, expand and develop until it has reached an astoundingly high degree of perfection. But as the actions of a person in the full vigor of perfect manhood are of far greater efficacy and consequence than those of a youth, or of a feeble child, so the good works performed by a soul that possesses a high degree of grace, are of greater value before God than the same works performed by one that possesses a lower degree.

Still another illustration will be found helpful in this connection. Various sums of money, though invested at the same rate, will yield different amounts of annual interest. Thus one thousand dollars and one million dollars invested at the rate of five per cent will yield an annual interest of fifty and fifty thousand dollars, respectively. By letting different sums represent different amounts of grace, and the same rate stand for the same work, it is plain that the result, namely merit, must vary considerably according to the amount of grace possessed by the soul.

In a former chapter (V) it was shown that one of the five fruits merited by good works is a proportionate increase of sanctifying grace, and that even the minutest good action contributes its proportionate share to this increase. It is plain, therefore, that the more numerous and the more excellent our actions are, the more rapid must be our growth in grace, and again, as we just saw, as our grace continues to increase, our good works continue to grow in value and meritoriousness before God. How truly wonderful! By all means make yourself perfectly fa-

miliar with this great truth, that *as your good works multiply your grace increases; and as your grace increases, your good works grow in meritoriousness.* Thus, for example (other conditions being equal), by reason of your growth in grace to-day the reception of Holy Communion will be more meritorious for you to-morrow than it was this morning; and so of all your other good actions.

This will enable you to understand, why it was that the saints of God made such great progress in perfection and are now so exalted in heaven. They were avaricious of grace and sought to make the best possible use of it in the performance of good works. The foregoing explanation will also let you see, why the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed those of all the other saints combined, for not only were all her actions performed in a most perfect manner, but they were also done under the influence of a grace which, both in kind and degree, immeasurably surpassed the collective graces given by God to the rest of His creatures. And lastly, because Jesus Christ, who is both God and Man, possesses grace in an infinite degree, all His human actions, the smallest as well as the greatest, were infinitely meritorious.

3. SECOND CAUSE: THE INTRINSIC EXCELLENCE OF GOOD WORKS.

"And every excellent work shall be justified, and the worker thereof shall be honored therein." [1]

The second cause of the difference of merit is

[1] Ecclus. 14; 21.

found in the difference of the intrinsic excellence proper to our various good works. Such a difference necessarily exists. The hearing of Mass, the reception of Holy Communion, the giving of alms, the pardoning of injuries, the patient endurance of pain, are all indeed meritorious works, but the intrinsic value of each of these differs greatly from that of the rest. It is true we cannot in this life know the precise value of our various actions, because this knowledge is God's secret; but just as different masses of diamond, gold, silver, iron and lead represent a great diversity of values, so each one of our virtuous actions has its own particular degree of excellence which exerts a very decided influence on the amount of merit to be gained by its performance.

But while we are ignorant of the special value of our good actions, there are at least two that we can safely place at the head of the list, namely: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. A few words on each.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

"This is my body, which is given for you; do this for a commemoration of me." [1]

Did you ever take the trouble to reflect seriously on the immense spiritual treasures that are at your disposal in the adorable sacrifice of the Mass? What the brilliancy of the noon-day sun is to the faint light of a candle, what the unmeasured volumes of water in the ocean are to the streams and rivers that irrigate

[1] Luke 22; 19.

the continents, what the value of a large diamond is to a heap of stones, that and much more the holy sacrifice is to your ordinary good works. One holy Mass, devoutly heard, surpasses in an immeasurable degree all the ordinary actions you may choose to perform during the rest of the day. Who then could attempt to gauge the vastness of the spiritual wealth that you may accumulate by assisting at it devoutly, and what a perennial source of purest joy it will be to you for all eternity, if on earth you participate as often as you can, perhaps daily, in its precious fruits and graces? It is no exaggeration to say, that, if the immense value of this heavenly gift were better known and appreciated by Christians, our churches and chapels would not suffice to accommodate the vast throngs that would hasten to appear morning after morning before the Altar of God, there to participate in the infinite fruits of the sacrifice of Calvary.

HOLY COMMUNION.

"He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him." [1]

Another means of extraordinary growth in grace, holiness and supernatural merit is the devout reception of our Lord in the Sacrament of His Love. He who has learned to communicate often, perhaps daily, has discovered an inexhaustible mine of choicest spiritual treasures, for Holy Communion, when devoutly received, produces a most marvellous increase of sanctifying grace. There the soul receives our

[1] John 6; 57.

Lord really and truly, and thus enjoys a privilege similar to that granted to St. John, whose head rested on the Sacred Heart at the Last Supper, or to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose singular prerogative it was to carry Him in her arms and to perform towards Him all the duties of a tender Mother. He who is the source and author of all grace and merit, comes personally to you in Holy Communion and lavishes on you unmistakable tokens of His boundless love. Consider how He longs for your companionship, and do not let indifference or lukewarmness keep you from often approaching this banquet of love; and try to realize that the more frequently you welcome Him into your heart now, the more fully will He reveal to you the splendor of His glory and majesty in His eternal kingdom. Do not remain away from daily, or at least frequent, communion on the plea of unworthiness; for remember: daily communion is not a reward of perfection, but a means for attaining it.

Supposing then, that you take up the practice, (if your duties do not interfere), of hearing Mass and receiving Holy Communion daily, your growth in grace and merit will be simply marvellous.

ORDINARY ACTIONS.

"Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that you shall receive of the Lord the reward of inheritance. Serve ye the Lord Christ!" [1]

It is necessary in this connection to say a few words on "Ordinary Actions." Comparatively few persons are able to devote themselves to the performance of

[1] Colos. 3; 23.

works of great intrinsic excellence, while there are multitudes whose activity from day to day, and year to year, is made up of an uninterrupted succession of "little things." They do indeed hear Mass and communicate whenever possible, but beyond this they are scarcely ever called upon to perform actions of an extraordinary character. For all these it must be the source of great consolation to learn that they are not handicapped in their endeavor to lay up treasure in heaven, even though no external splendor attaches to their daily routine work. On the contrary they may, by great purity of intention and faultless fidelity, succeed in gaining vastly more merit in the discharge of the most common-place duties, than others, who are wanting in this purity of intention, acquire by works of high intrinsic excellence. The frequency with which little things and ordinary actions must be done more than counterbalances the absence of great intrinsic value.

GOOD DESIRES.

"Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth!"[1]

In the great work of sanctifying your daily life you cannot afford to overlook the great value of good desires, for they too can be made the easy means of exceedingly rich merit. Just as a wilfully entertained desire to commit a sin renders a man guilty of sin, even though the desire was not carried out in act, so on the other hand the fervent desire to accomplish

[1] Col. 3; 2.

great things for God's honor and glory is an act of virtue pleasing to Him and meritorious for yourself. An earnest desire to hear Mass, to receive Holy Communion, (Spiritual Communion), to visit the Blessed Sacrament, or to do any other good work will invariably procure for you a large increase in grace and merit. God accepts the desire, when the deed is impossible of execution. If then you are really intent on growing rich in merit, you will not fail to cultivate the habit of fostering holy desires. You may for this purpose use one or all of the first three petitions of the Our Father: Hallowed be Thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done! or any other aspiration that you may select to formulate your desires to promote God's honor and glory.

4. THIRD CAUSE: PURITY AND FERVOR OF INTENTION.

"Give your hearts and your souls to seek the Lord your God." [1]

The far-reaching influence of the intention on a meritorious action has been sufficiently pointed out in Chap. IV, 5. Suffice it here to remark that too much stress cannot be laid on the necessity of *purity* of intention, if you are really determined to gain the highest amount of merit that can be gained. Blessed indeed will you be if you master the science of doing all your actions, both great and small, solely for the honor, love and glory of God, and resolutely exclude all unworthy and selfish motives, for you will

[1] 1 Paral. 22; 19.

then impart a high degree of perfection even to your most trifling and insignificant actions; but if you fail in this one point you shall sustain heavy and irreparable losses in your spiritual traffic.

UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST.

"All whatsoever you do, whether in word or in work, do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." [1]

Another practice of vast importance in the spiritual life, and one that is highly recommended by the saints is that of uniting yourself continually with your divine Savior, and performing your actions in union with His. When you pray join yourself with Him as He prayed in the crib, at Nazareth, in the desert, on the mountains, in His agony in the garden or on the Cross; when you work, unite yourself with Him as He toiled in the workshop of St. Joseph or performed chores for His Blessed Mother; when you are tried by pains, contradictions or persecutions, join yourself with Him in the various stages of His bitter Passion; when you take food, recreate yourself, or retire to rest, endeavor to do so in the spirit in which He performed these indifferent but necessary actions. In order, however, to succeed in so holy a practice you must try to study very attentively His life by reading, reflection and prayerful meditation. It is easy to see how fidelity to so holy an exercise must necessarily give a new character to your whole life; it will purify your intention, it will nourish in your soul — as oil does fire — the burning desire to glorify

[1] Col. 3; 17.

Him to your utmost ability, it will serve as a protection against the mildew of tepidity, and finally, it will increase your eternal reward in heaven in a most wonderful manner.

5. FOURTH CAUSE: THE FREQUENT RENEWAL OF THE GOOD INTENTION.

"How I have loved Thy law, O Lord! it is my meditation all the day long." [1]

While always aiming at animating all your works with great purity of intention, you must also cultivate the practice of frequently renewing your good intention in the course of the day. It is true all your good actions are supernaturally meritorious as long as they are performed in the state of grace and from supernatural motives; but it must not be forgotten that the frequent renewal of the express intention to do them for God imparts a special value to them. The reason lies in this, that the renewed resolve intensifies your motives and thus makes you act with greater intensity of love, and more directly for God's honor and glory.* If then your intention is always pure, and often renewed with great fervor, the possibilities of rich merit, even while you are attending to the merest routine work that is assigned to you by your superiors or by your state of life, will defy all at-

[1] Ps. 118; 97.

* As the repeated resolve to commit sin, or the express approbation of a sin, renders the sin more heinous by reason of perversity of will, so on the other hand the repeated resolve to do good, intensifies the will, and thus imparts a greater value to a virtuous action.

tempts at calculation. A lively faith in the truth that there are no trifles in the service of God will of necessity stimulate you to great fidelity in this matter.

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD INTENTION.

"Lord all my desire is before Thee."[1]

Immediately on awakening in the morning let it be your first concern to make a most fervent, whole-souled offering of the whole day to your divine Savior. Any pious aspiration, as: "O My Jesus, I offer to you every thought, word and action of this day," or: "O my Jesus, all for love of you, and in union with your divine actions," will suffice to consecrate to Him your whole day's activity. During the day repeat these or similar acts, if possible, at stated times; for instance, when the clock strikes or a change of duty takes place.

"INDIFFERENT ACTIONS" AND THE GOOD INTENTION.

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God."[2]

Your various actions may be either good, bad or indifferent. Good actions, when performed with the requisite dispositions, are always meritorious; *e. g.*, Mass, Communion, prayers, alms, acts of kindness, etc. Bad or sinful actions always become the source of punishment; *e. g.*, hatred, anger, detraction, etc. So-called "indifferent" actions, however, are in them-

[1] Ps. 37; 10.
[2] 1 Cor. 10; 31.

selves neither good nor bad, hence deserving neither of reward nor of punishment, but they are made either good or bad by the kind of intention that directs them. Eating, drinking, resting, sleeping, taking recreation, indulging in lawful amusements or relaxations are actions of this nature, which by means of an intention to do them for God, can be converted into meritorious works.

Realizing that a great part of your life is taken up with such indifferent, but necessary, actions — one-third of your life is taken up by sleep alone — it must surely be gratifying to know that you can sanctify them all and thus use them to promote your greater glory in heaven. By all means seek to utilize to its fullest extent this easy but effective means of supernatural merit, and carry out the advice of St. Paul: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all to the glory of God."

6. FIFTH CAUSE: THE NUMBER OF MERITORIOUS WORKS.

"Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." [1]

This point is so self-evident, that explanation is useless. A few calculations, however, will not be without interest. One man hears Mass and communicates daily, recites the rosary every day, and practises three acts of self-denial; while another hears Mass only on days of obligation, communicates but once a year, and neglects altogether to say the rosary and

[1] 1 Cor. 3; 8.

to deny himself. The former will annually have to his credit about 360 Masses and 360 Communions, 18,345 Hail Marys and 1,095 acts of self-denial; while the latter will have only about 58 Masses and one Communion, for which he can claim a reward. Extend this to all special good works, and you must be convinced of the folly of those who through tepidity omit the performance of such acts as they could perform with little trouble to themselves. How would men of the world act, if every one of these works meant the gain of just one dollar?

THE MULTIPLICITY AND VARIETY OF GOOD WORKS.

"Brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election."[1]

It will repay us to take a somewhat extended survey of the vast field of spiritual activity in which you are engaged to labor. This study may at first appear trifling, and even childish to some, but upon serious reflection its appropriateness will be apparent, for the secret of success in laying up treasure in heaven lies to a great extent in recognizing and turning to good account your daily opportunities of merit. If you contemn and neglect the little things of daily life, you will continually be losing most precious chances of adding to your heavenly store. Before the science of chemistry had attained its present stage of development, many things were cast off as mere waste; now this "waste" often becomes the source of great

[1] 2 Pet. 1; 10.

wealth, as for example, in the case of coal, from which now no less than twelve valuable by-products are obtained. It is the same in the spiritual life. By setting a high value on the little things of life, and turning them to good account your increase in grace will be truly wonderful; but if you take no pains to appreciate their importance, your losses will necessarily be very great.

THE DUTIES OF YOUR STATE OF LIFE.

"Make your ways and your doings good, and I will dwell with you in this place." [1]

There are in the first place all those works, actions and duties inseparable from your particular state of life, which you are bound to perform and cannot leave undone, whether you perform them willingly or unwillingly. Whether you are a religious, a cleric, a business man, a professional man, a day laborer or a servant; whether you are a father, or mother, or son, or daughter — it matters not what state you are in — that state has certain duties attached to it from which there is no escape. They simply must be performed. Why not take scrupulous care to sanctify them all, since every one of them can add to your merit? Remember it is quite possible for you to go through life without profiting by these well-nigh countless opportunities that meet you at every step. Learn then to make them as fruitful as possible of heavenly merit and an eternity of increased glory will amply repay you for your trouble.

[1] Jer. 7; 3.

FREE AND VOLUNTARY ACTS OF PIETY.

"Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." [1]

In the next place we may consider those works to which you are not strictly obliged, but which you can easily perform with little trouble and inconvenience to yourself, and — we may add — which you will be eager to perform, if you are really in earnest about acquiring a high degree of union with God. Thus you are not obliged to hear Mass oftener than once a week nor to communicate more than once a year; you are not bound to recite the Rosary, to join pious societies, to visit the Blessed Sacrament, etc.; but if you have learned to set a just value on heavenly things, you can hardly resist the desire to perform these and similar good works as often as time, occupation and circumstances allow. These free and voluntary acts of virtue mean very much in the service of God and are productive of great increase in merit. You must, however, carefully observe one caution: These voluntary acts of piety must never conflict with the duties of your state of life.

THE THREE EMINENT GOOD WORKS.

"Prayer is good with fasting and alms, more than to lay up treasures of gold." [2]

There is another class of good works which Holy Scripture declares necessary; that is, every Christian must strive to perform them to some extent, if his

[1] 1 Tim. 4; 8. [2] Tob. 12; 8.

faith is to be a practical and living faith. They are: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving.

PRAYER.

"We ought always to pray and not to faint." [1]

By prayer in its widest meaning we understand every act that is directed to the praise, worship and adoration of God. We shall content ourselves here with simply indicating some of the many forms in which it may be practised.

The sign of the cross, genuflections, holy thoughts, pious desires, fervent aspirations, invocations of the holy names of Jesus and Mary, ejaculatory prayers, the vocal prayers which devout Christians are accustomed to say; namely morning and evening prayers, grace at meals, and the Angelus; further, the pious use of blessed articles, as holy water, medals, scapulars and crucifixes; the hearing of sermons, the reading of edifying books (spiritual reading), prayerful reflection on the word of God (meditation), the reception of the Sacraments, and the participating in the public devotions of the Church. All day long you will find opportunities to practise one or other of these forms of prayer, and thus you are able to "pray without ceasing," as our Lord exhorts us to do.

FASTING.

"Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping and in mourning." [2]

The word "fasting" may be said to embrace all

[1] Luke 18; 1. [2] Joel 2; 12.

those acts which serve both to curb and control our irregular inclinations and passions, and to make atonement to God for past offences. In an extended sense the term "fasting" may be applied to the patient endurance of trials and to the practice of self-denial generally. We shall treat this last point separately.

The fasting here recommended may be practised in several ways. (1.) By the faithful observance of all the laws of the Church regarding fasts and abstinence, as far as conditions of health, occupation, etc., permit: (2.) by voluntary acts of self-denial in eating and drinking, especially where there is no danger to health. (Ill health is often the result of over-indulgence in food and drink, especially in intoxicants and delicacies.) Acts of this kind are: not eating between meals, abstaining from delicacies, leaving the best things to others, not complaining at badly prepared food, and similar little acts of mortification.

ALMSGIVING.

"Son, defraud not the poor of alms, and turn not away thy eyes from the poor." [1]

Every true Christian must have a practical conviction not only of the great meritoriousness of almsgiving, but also of the necessity of practising it according to his means and ability. Our Lord's teaching on this point is plain and unmistakable. The rich man in the parable, who is charged merely with having "feasted sumptuously every day" and having neglected to feed the poor man Lazarus, was buried

[1] Ecclus. 4; 1.

in hell, where even a drop of cold water is denied him. The last sentence on the day of the final judgment, that will seal irrevocably the fate of every man will be determined in each case by the performance or the non-performance of works of Christian charity to the poor and needy. "Come, ye blessed of my Father,— I was hungry, and you gave me to eat," etc., and: "Depart from me, ye cursed,— for I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat," etc., are the two sentences that will forever fix the eternal lot of mankind.

How much alms is every one bound to give? To this question we must reply that it is impossible to define exactly the limits of the duty of almsgiving; but you will be safe, if you follow the advice of Tobias to his son: "My son, according to thy ability be merciful; if thou have much, give abundantly; but if thou have little, take care, even so to bestow willingly a little." [1]

You make God your debtor, when you give alms and practise charity to the poor; they are His friends and their prayers will procure for you many special graces and favors.

THE CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." [2]

Do not commit the fatal mistake, as unfortunately many Christians do, of forgetting that it is a duty to perform works of mercy. God has imposed it on

[1] Tob. 4; 8. [2] Matt. 25; 40.

you, and its performance will determine your lot in eternity. He commands you to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, harbor the stranger, visit the captive and bury the dead.

One of the ways in which you can easily discharge this duty, is to join some charitable society, for example, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, or the Ladies of Charity, and conscientiously fulfil the obligations it imposes. Should you not be able to join such societies, give them at least your financial and moral support.

Endeavor to assist according to your means some of the many charitable institutions, which depend for their subsistence on the generosity of benefactors, and if possible, remember them in your last will. Do not forget, however, that what you give in charity in your lifetime will procure for you far greater merit, than what you may set aside for this purpose to be given after your death. And who knows whether avaricious friends and relatives will allow your will in this matter to be carried out? Many a charitable bequest is foiled by persons who contest the will of deceased relatives. There are many hospitals, homes for the aged, asylums for orphans, insane, incurables, etc., that are *now* in need of your charitable assistance, and cannot afford to wait till you die, to stay off hunger, ward off disease, or meet current expenses.

Remember in particular, that there are two things that will greatly increase the meritoriousness of your charity to the poor: (1.) Self-denial, in order to have something to give, and (2.) Personal Service.

As to the former, consider for example, how much charity you could do every year, simply by denying yourself daily to the extent of just five or ten cents, be this in regard to liquor, or cigars, or delicacies, or amusements, or any other indulgence, part of which you could easily sacrifice for the love of God! In this way you would be able to give to charity no less than from eighteen to thirty-six dollars every year, and at the same time earn the reward of the self-denial involved. As to the second point: Personal Service, you must know that by personally visiting the poor and the sick and rendering them kind services, you are actually ministering to Jesus Christ Himself, who has left the poor in His stead, and will reward all that is done to them, as if it were done to Him in person. "What you have done to these my least brethren you have done to me."[1] *

[1] Matt. 25; 40.

* In these days of naturalism (absence of supernatural religion), our Catholic people must be reminded that philanthropy, of which we hear so much on all sides, has no supernatural value in the sight of God. The reason lies in the fact, that it is practised not from supernatural, but from merely natural motives, and these are often rendered sinful by the desire for human applause, ambition, newspaper notoriety, etc. Philanthropists may do a great deal of natural good in relieving human misery, but they must expect to hear one day these crushing words: "Amen, I say to you, you have received your reward."[2] Christian charity, on the contrary, is a supernatural virtue which seeks to do good to the neighbor for the love of God. It disavows natural motives. It is very sensitive as to publicity, and shrinks from it, lest it should forego its eternal reward in heaven; it always tries to conform to the rule given by our Lord to do our good works without

[2] Matt. 6; 2.

You must, therefore, always bear in mind that charity to the poor is not only a very efficacious means of rich supernatural merit, but also an imperative duty that cannot be neglected without running the risk of losing your soul.

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY.

"Pray ye one for another, that you may be saved." [1]

It may happen that you are so situated that it is im-

ostentation: "When thou dost alms let not thy left hand know, what thy right hand doth, that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee." [2] Philanthropy is to charity what a lifeless corpse is to a living body: the corpse may be beautiful, but it is soulless; the living body may possess no beauty, but it has vigor and vitality.

Again, there are some who imagine that they are doing their full duty in the matter of charity and alms-giving, when they patronize bazaars, carnivals, dances, balls, etc., gotten up for "charity." Aside from the fact that these occasions are rarely free from such evils as jealousy, envy, uncharitableness, detraction, vulgar display of dress and temptation to graver sins, we must not forget, that a "charity" which gives something on condition of receiving an immediate recompense in the shape of a prize, amusement, pleasure, or human glory, has already received its reward, and has lost its claim to a recompense in heaven. True charity must have the love of God for its soul.

The correct idea of Christian charity is contained in these words of our Lord: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy neighbors, who are rich, lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and recompense be made to thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense; for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just." [3]

[1] James 5; 16.
[2] Matt. 6; 3
[3] Luke 14; 12.

possible for you to devote yourself to the practice of the corporal works of mercy; in that case endeavor all the more diligently to practise the seven spiritual works of mercy. They are the following: Counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing sinners, comforting the afflicted, forgiving injuries, bearing wrongs patiently and praying for the living and the dead.

It is very likely, however, that you are not able to perform several of these directly; if so, endeavor to perform them at least indirectly. This you can do by assisting according to your means those who consecrate their lives to these works of mercy. You can distribute books and good reading matter among the poor, or pay towards such distribution; you can become a member of missionary societies at home and abroad, and thereby aid in spreading the faith; you can help to erect and maintain Christian schools, and in many other ways do your share in extending the Kingdom of God on earth.

If you are blessed with the goods of this world you can do a highly meritorious work by aiding poor youths who are preparing for the priesthood, either by establishing a burse in some seminary, or helping in other ways to defray the expenses inseparable from the training of young priests. In return you will share for all eternity the fruits of their pastoral labors, and one of the ingredients of your happiness in heaven will be the consciousness that many of the elect owe their salvation to your charity.

Above all, no matter what your state of life, you can uninterruptedly attend to one thing, namely,

prayer for the living, that they may be saved, and prayer for the dead, that they may soon be released from purgatory and admitted to the bliss of heaven. And if you love the Church, and have her interests at heart, you will never cease praying for the following intentions: the welfare, freedom and spread of the Church; the success of missions at home and abroad; the conversion of sinners, heretics and pagans; the increase of vocations to the priestly state; the growth and development of religious communities; the sanctification of the clergy; in one word, for the fulfilment of the petition: "Thy kingdom come." [1]

EJACULATORY PRAYERS.

"Let nothing hinder thee from praying always." [1]

The pious habit of frequently using ejaculatory prayers is of inestimable value in the spiritual life generally, but especially in the work of laying up treasure in heaven. What the frequent addition of good fuel is to a brightly burning fire, and the process of correct breathing to the health of the body, that the practice of frequently using ejaculatory prayers is to the love of God in the soul. You can use them anywhere, at any time, and any number of times in the day without interrupting your work, tiring yourself or causing inconvenience to others. Besides, their brevity contributes to greater fervor than is usually possible in the recitation of longer prayers, because there is less room for distractions and other obstacles. The only difficulty about it is the forming

[1] Ecclus. 18; 22.

of the habit; but if you have learned to appreciate the immense advantages to be derived from these prayers, it will not be long before you will have succeeded in acquiring the habit of sending up to heaven all day long these flaming darts of the love of God. A modicum of good will is all that is needed. Adopt then this salutary practice, and you will not only increase most wonderfully the fire of divine love in your heart, and lay up a vast amount of merit in heaven, but you will also be able to afford great relief to the suffering souls in purgatory, especially by the use of such ejaculatory prayers as are indulgenced. Select a few from the following list and accustom yourself to use them often in the course of the day.*

A SELECTION OF INDULGENCED PRAYERS.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS with the words: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

50 days each time. 100 days each time, if made with Holy Water. Pius IX., March 23, 1866.

Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

300 days each time. Pius X., May 8, 1907.

All for Thee, most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

300 days each time. Pius X., Nov. 26, 1908.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, Thy Kingdom Come.

300 days each time. Pius X., May 4, 1906.

O Heart of Love, I place all my trust in Thee; for

* It is recommended daily to renew the intention of gaining all the indulgences that are attached to the various devotions and good works you perform in the course of the day.

though I fear all things from my weakness, I hope all things from Thy mercies.

300 days each time. Pius X., June 3, 1908.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.

300 days each time. Pius X., Sept. 13, 1905.

Lord Jesus, protect with Thy divine Heart, Our Holy Father, the Pope.

300 days each time. Pius X., April 10, 1907.

Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

300 days each time. Pius X., Dec. 26, 1907.

Divine Heart of Jesus, convert sinners, save the dying, set free the holy souls in Purgatory.

300 days each time. Pius X., Nov. 6, 1906.

Jesus and Mary.

300 days each time. Pius X., Oct. 10, 1904.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph.

Seven years and seven times 40 days each time. Plenary once a month. Pius X., June 8, 1906.

My Jesus, Mercy!

300 days each time. Pius X., May 20, 1911.

Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things.

50 days each time. Pius IX., May 7, 1854.

O Sweetest Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may ever love Thee more and more.

300 days each time. Pius IX., Nov. 26, 1876.

Eternal Father! I offer Thee the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in satisfaction for my sins, and for the wants of Holy Church.

100 days each time. Pius VII., Sept. 22, 1817.

O Lord, preserve to us the Faith.

100 days each time. Pius X., March 20, 1908.

My Lord and my God.

Seven years and seven times 40 days each time when said while looking upon the Blessed Sacrament either during the Elevation in the Mass, or when exposed on the Altar. Pius X., May 18, 1907.

My God, unite all minds in the truth and all hearts in charity.

300 days each time. Pius X., May 30, 1908.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, pray for us.

100 days each time. Pius X., July 9, 1904.

Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation.

300 days each time. Plenary, once a month. Pius IX., Sept. 30, 1852.

Mary, our hope, have pity on us.

300 days each time. Pius X., January 8, 1906.

Blessed be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the most blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

300 days each time. Leo XIII., Sept. 10, 1878.

Mary sorrowing, Mother of all Christians, pray for us.

300 days each time. Pius X., June 27, 1906.

Our Lady of the Most Holy Sacrament, pray for us.

300 days each time before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. Pius X., January 10, 1906.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

300 days each time. Pius X., Nov. 9, 1907.

Dear Lord Jesus, grant them (or him) eternal rest.

300 days each time. Pius X., March 18, 1909.

N. B. All these indulgences may be applied to the Suffering Souls in Purgatory.

PATIENCE, SELF-DENIAL AND MORTIFICATION.

"Patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing." [1] "And they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences." [2]

Another very prolific source of supernatural merit is the steady practice of the virtues of patience, self-denial and mortification, as required of all who desire to be true disciples and imitators of their Crucified Savior. Without going into particulars to show the necessity of these virtues, we shall merely content ourselves with indicating a few of the various ways in which they may be practised by all, even by those who on account of sickness or delicate health may be excused from more severe exercises of penance.

(1.) By patiently enduring the inconvenience arising from heat, cold, change of weather, hunger, thirst, poor service, neglect of proper care and attendance, unexpected and annoying delays, weariness, loss of sleep or necessary rest, in one word, anything that causes you physical sufferings.

(2.) In your social relations: patiently bear the pains caused by inconsiderateness, incivility, impoliteness, unkindness, forgetfulness, awkwardness, misunderstandings, coldness, hatred, enmity, calumny, persecution and the like.

(3.) In imitation of Jesus Christ endure with resignation poverty and the inconveniences coming from it; sickness and its accompaniments, whether intensity or duration of pain; and in general, any corporal,

[1] James 1; 4 [2] Gal. 5; 24.

temporal or spiritual affliction which God may send you for the health of your soul.

(4.) Innumerable opportunities for the exercise of these virtues will be found in the endeavor to practise meekness, gentleness, kindness and cordiality towards all men, especially towards persons for whom you experience an unaccountable aversion, or who may in any way have wronged you.

(5.) Lastly, the persevering endeavor to cultivate genuinely Christian politeness, by which you treat all with whom you come in contact, as you would treat our Lord, if it were your privilege to enjoy His companionship, will be the perennial source of little, but highly meritorious acts of self-denial.

UNWORLDLINESS.

"Be not conformed to this world!" [1] "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." [2]

This chapter, which at first sight may appear irrelevant to our subject, is advisedly introduced here for several reasons.

(1.) Worldliness is the Christian's most insidious and dangerous enemy. By means of its false promises of happiness, its enticing charms and seductive pleasures it often succeeds in accomplishing what even the most cruel and violent persecutions are powerless to effect — the destruction of the virtue of faith. It invariably inflicts great injury on the spiritual life of Catholics, even when it does not lead to apostasy.

[1] Rom. 12; 2. [2] James 4; 4.

Benumbing and crippling, as it always does, the faculties of the soul, it renders her insensible and indifferent to the things of the higher life: virtue, holiness, union with God. There are unfortunately many Catholics who are infected with the poisonous atmosphere of worldliness in which they are forced to live, and as a consequence are not only losing countless opportunities of merit, but are also living in danger of eternal perdition. "All that is in the world, is concupiscence of the flesh [impurity], and concupiscence of the eyes [avarice, love of money], and the pride of life [pride, ambition], which is not of the Father, but of the world." [1]

(2.) That worldliness is irreconcilable with a Christian life is best seen in the conduct of our Savior. He assumed, and all His life maintained against the world and its spirit — worldliness — an uncompromising attitude of bitter enmity. He who came to save that which was lost, who was most compassionate towards sinners, and who prayed for his inhuman executioners, positively refused to pray for His irreconcilable enemy — the world. "I pray not for the world," He declared. It would indeed be a fatal mistake, in the face of such a declaration, to imagine that you can be a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time.

(3.) Aside from the dangers springing from attachment to the world, and undue devotion to its pleasures, you cannot, if you desire to be a disciple of Jesus Crucified, afford to forget the imperative duty of denying yourself constantly. If your love of God

[1] 1 John 2; 16.

is genuine, it will urge you to conform yourself to your Crucified Master, and to declare with St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." [1]

(4.) The steady practice of flight of worldliness will contribute extensively to your treasure in heaven, for it necessarily demands the practice of a large number of other virtues, notably of self-denial and mortification.

(5.) The example of Jesus Christ will silence all objections raised by worldly-minded persons against the necessity of keeping aloof from the pleasures and delights that are to be found in a world that is totally seated in wickedness. Divine Truth has spoken: "If any one love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him." [2]

All that remains now is to indicate in a few words how you should act in order to practise this necessary detachment from the world. While living *in* the world, you must not be *of* the world. Observe moderation in all such things as are lawful, but may easily turn your heart from God. Such are various amusements, theatricals, dances, certain kinds of parties, and the like. (Should any of these be for you a proximate occasion of mortal sin, you are in conscience bound to avoid them. You would commit sin by frequenting them.) Learn to deny yourself in these things for the love of Jesus agonizing on the Cross; devote the money thus saved to some charitable purpose, and you will reap a rich everlasting reward in heaven, in

[1] Gal. 6; 15. [2] 1 John 2; 15.

place of the delights of a moment, which only too often leave behind them a sting of bitterness in a wounded heart.

In the same spirit of unworldliness endeavor to cultivate Christian modesty, decency and simplicity in dress, and do not slavishly follow the tyrannical dictates of Fashion. Remember, if any fashion you adopt violates the principles of Christian virtue, especially of purity and chastity, you may easily render yourself guilty of the sin of scandal, that is, by your indecent manner of dress you may directly be the cause of temptation and sin to others. Seriously reflect on the following warnings of our Blessed Savior: "He that shall scandalize (*i. e.* cause to fall into sin) one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come, but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." [1] *

[1] Matt. 18; 6.

* On this point, which has much to do with Christian morality, it is best to draw the attention of Catholic women to the directions which Holy Scripture gives them. St. Peter writes: "Let wives be subject to their husbands; . . . whose adorning let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, nor the wearing of gold, nor the putting on of apparel; but the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God." [2] St. Paul is still more emphatic when he writes: "In like manner, women also [having the same dispositions as men, namely, the spirit of prayer, purity, patience, meekness] in decent [modest] apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire, but as

[2] 1 Pet. 3; 3.

7. SIXTH CAUSE: THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED.

"I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." [1]

The difficulties that we may encounter in the doing of good works constitute the sixth cause of the difference of merit. It is an everyday experience that obstacles of all kinds must be overcome in the practice of Christian virtue. We encounter them from within and from without. Within us, we have a nature, weakened and vitiated by sin, rebelling against the things of the higher life, while it continually craves and clamors for the things that work for the destruction of the soul. From without we encounter the bitter enmity of the devil and the enticing allurements of his ally — the world, both determined to deprive us at all costs of our glorious inheritance in heaven. Hence the ceaseless struggle till our eyes have closed in death, and the necessity of constantly using on ourselves a holy violence both to avoid evil and to do good.

ADVANTAGES OF DIFFICULTIES.

"But the God of all grace, . . . after you have suffered a little will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you." [2]

It is not only very consoling, but also very necessary to know, that the difficulties which you encoun-

becometh women that profess godliness, [let them be adorned] with good works." [3]

[1] Rom. 8; 18.
[2] 1 Pet. 5; 10.
[3] 1 Tim. 2; 9

ter in the doing of good, be they repugnance, dryness, coldness or even disgust for the things of God, or physical pains that must be endured in the accomplishing of God's will, can be utilized, and it is God's desire they should be utilized, for the still greater increase of the amount of merit that already attaches to your actions. Rest assured, that you never have better opportunities for gaining abundant merits, than when pain of some kind accompanies a good work and renders its performance difficult. True, flesh and blood rebel against this hard truth, but if you have ever studied the Passion of your Divine Redeemer you will know how to trample on the suggestions of nature, and cheerfully suffer with Him and for Him. "If you suffer with Him, you shall be glorified with Him." You cannot possibly exhibit a more solid and incontestable proof of genuine love of God, and at the same time gain richer merits, than when you practise virtue under the stress of those difficulties which either your own weak nature, or the world and the devil place in your way, in order to discourage you, turn you from God and deprive you of your heavenly glory.

SOLID PROOF OF TRUE LOVE.

"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."[1]

Blessed indeed will you be, if you persevere faithfully in the service of God amidst the trials and sufferings, which God inflicts on you because He loves you and desires to promote your greater glory in heaven.

[1] 1 Gal. 6; 14.

When once you have succeeded in taking this view of your sufferings — the only correct view — that God sends them to you because He loves you, you will find it comparatively easy to endure patiently, resignedly and even cheerfully not only physical sufferings, such as sickness, pains, loss of temporal goods, loss of relatives and friends, but also spiritual trials, as temptations, dryness, repugnance and disgust in the performance of your devotions. Your endurance of these sufferings will be a solid proof of true love of Him. Never fail to unite yourself with Jesus suffering on the Cross, and under all circumstances, be they ever so trying, seek to render to Him a faithful, punctual and exact service. Could you but see the superabundant rewards that such devotion to God infallibly secures! Courage! "In due time you shall reap, not failing."

TEMPTATIONS; THEIR NATURE AND USE.

"Because thou wast acceptable to God it was necessary that temptation should prove thee." [1]

Perhaps the most painful trials that can afflict God-fearing souls are temptations. But while they subject the soul to severe ordeals they play a very important part in the process of her sanctification. In fact they are necessary. The consideration, that when rightly managed, they become the source of rich and abundant merits, should encourage you to fight manfully in the life-long struggle that every true servant of God must encounter.

The following advices will be very helpful to souls

[1] Tob. 12; 13.

that are easily alarmed and discouraged at the approach of temptations.

(1.) Temptations * (from *tentare,* to try, test, prove the worth of anything) in themselves are never sin. They become sinful only, when you deliberately seek them, unnecessarily expose yourself to them, are pleased with them when you advert to them, or finally, if you consent to their suggestions. But as long as they are involuntary on your part, and you refuse to consent to them, they are *not* sinful.

(2.) By resisting temptations you exhibit incontestable proofs of true and solid love of God. What more convincing proof of love than the refusal to do something that is displeasing to God! The soldier who prefers death to treason, is no less a hero than he who marches up to the cannon's mouth. Continued and persevering resistance means continual and steady growth in the love of God.

(3.) By resisting temptations you practise in a very high degree the virtues against which you are tempted; you become more perfect in these virtues, and at the

* Note.—A distinction must be made between temptations of probation and temptations of seduction. The former denote the special trials to which God sometimes subjects certain persons in order to test or try their virtue, or to prepare them for some extraordinary work, as in the case of Abraham, Job, Tobias, and many saints of the New Testament. The latter denote the solicitations to sin which come from the devil, who, either directly, or by means of the flesh and the world, endeavors to lead souls into the commission of sin. Temptations of seduction are *permitted* by God for the greater glory of His servants. God always gives, in answer to humble and fervent prayer, the graces necessary for victory.

same time acquire an increase of grace and merit. Is not this a real gain? You will possess greater glory in heaven, if during life you are tried by temptations than you would if you were exempt from their molestations.

(4.) The following directions will prove helpful in times of temptation. After imploring promptly and earnestly God's grace, and the powerful help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom you should go with a childlike trust and confidence, calmly but firmly endeavor to direct your mind to some distracting occupation, *e. g.,* reading, conversation, work, etc. It is, as a rule, not advisable to struggle directly with a temptation, especially if it is directed against faith or holy purity. Despise and contemn the suggestions of the evil one, but do not consent to dispute with him, and do not allow yourself to be disturbed, for as long as you do not yield consent of the will and do not take pleasure, there is no sin committed.

(5.) Take comfort in the thought that even though your temptations are ever so violent, last ever so long, are ever so numerous and ever so filthy, you can all the while be as pure as an angel in the sight of God, and after the conflict you will be more pleasing to Him than you were before it, on account of the proofs of love and fidelity you have given Him, and the increase of grace you acquired.

(6.) God, who permits these temptations to try you, will never allow you to be tempted above your strength, but will always give you, in answer to your prayers, the graces necessary for victory in the combat.

(7.) Often recall the words of St. James: "Blessed is the man, who endureth temptations, for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him." [1]

8. SEVENTH CAUSE: THE PARTICULAR STATE OF LIFE.

"One thing is wanting to thee: go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [2]

The last cause that helps to determine the particular amount of merit to be gained by good works, is the vocation or state of life in which the soul's lot is cast. Theologians generally recognize four states of life: Matrimony, Virginity, the Religious State and the Priesthood, but for our purpose we shall here speak in a very general way of only two: the Religious State and the Secular State. Other conditions being equal, a person that has embraced the religious life possesses untold advantages over one that remains in the secular state. That life-long consecration of all his powers and faculties to the praise, honor and glory of God, and that unreserved dedication to His service, which is effected by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are equivalent to a continual, unbroken act of intense charity, and this charity exercises a far-reaching influence on the meritorious character of all the actions performed by the religious. He moves on a higher plane, enjoys more ample privi-

[1] James 1; 12. [2] Mark 10; 21.

leges, and works with a more copious supply of graces than a secular, and hence his good works deserve a greater reward. As in a large business-combine, *e. g.*, a railroad company, a high official's salary exceeds greatly the wages of an ordinary employee, though his physical work seems far less taxing than that of the latter, so too a religious enjoys immensely greater advantages, in point of supernatural merit, than one who lives in the secular state. In his case even the most trivial actions, provided his other dispositions are perfect, may become more valuable and meritorious before God, than the most heroic and brilliant deeds of a secular, when these are vitiated by impure motives. The vows of the religious reach out and seize and transform all his actions, enhance their value and augment their merit in a most wonderful manner.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

"And to one servant he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another, one; to everyone according to his ability." [1]

The Parable of the Talents will serve to illustrate in a more tangible manner the difference between the several states of life. The religious state may be said to correspond to five talents; the state of virginity to two, and the state of matrimony to one talent.* A talent represents a sum of money varying from one thousand to two thousand dollars. Supposing these sums to be invested at the same rate, the interest

[1] Matt. 25; 15.

* NOTE.—In the order of excellence the religious state comes first, that of virginity (embraced by persons in the world) comes second, and that of matrimony last.

on five talents will always exceed the interest on the other two sums, in the first case two and one-half times and in the second, five times. Let a religious and a secular perform the very same work, *e. g.* hear Mass, the one under obedience, the other from choice, and supposing all other conditions of merit to be equal in both, it will be found that the former gains more merit than the latter, simply because he lives in a state of greater merit.

It may indeed happen, and in fact often does happen, that a fervent secular, in spite of his smaller amount of grace, gains vastly more merit than a lukewarm religious with a more copious supply, just as a man who invests a thousand dollars at twelve per cent, receives more annual interest than he who invests five thousand dollars at only two per cent; but the truth remains, that the religious state offers advantages of the very highest perfection and richest merit obtainable. Should the religious fail it is entirely through his own fault; the blame attaches to himself alone.

PROBABLE RESULTS OF BETTER KNOWLEDGE.

"And Peter began to say to Him: Behold, we have left all things and have followed Thee, what reward shall we have? And Jesus answered: Amen, I say to you there is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel, who shall not receive a hundred fold as much now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come, life everlasting."[1]

These reflections on the influence of the vows on the merit of our actions tempt us to engage in a little

[1] Mark 10; *28*.—Matt. 19; *27*.

speculation. If these truths about religious life and its relation to heavenly glory were more widely known and better appreciated by Christians as a whole, might we not expect to witness a most wonderful spectacle throughout the entire world? Three great results, it seems to us, would be realized. In the first place, all, or at least nearly all, religious would esteem the precious grace of their vocation to the life of evangelical perfection far more than they often do, and endeavor with untiring energy, to trade with their talent at the highest available rate of interest, *i. e.*, they would constantly aim at performing all their actions in the most perfect manner possible. Secondly, on account of this increase of fervor that would animate all, or at least the majority, of the members, entire religious communities would feel the happy effects of this reformation, and soon be changed into veritable paradises of choicest Christian virtues. And lastly, might we not with reason expect this wonderful thing: seculars of every rank, class and station would cheerfully and resolutely bid an eternal farewell to the world with its vain, seductive and deadly pleasures, and bury themselves in the solitude of religious houses, there to attend to one thing only: to love God with their whole heart, their whole soul, their whole mind and their whole strength, and thus store up in heaven "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and one that cannot fade"?[1]

How many girls and young women would imitate the example set by a St. Agnes, a St. Clare, a St. Catherine of Siena and countless other holy virgins,

[1] 1 Pet. 1; 3.

and, cheerfully renouncing all prospects of a life of comfort, ease, pleasure, amusement and worldly gratification, would dedicate the priceless virtues of chastity and virginity to Jesus Christ, the lover of pure souls, fully persuaded that there is absolutely no comparison between the sacrifice they make for love of Him, and the unspeakable reward that He will give them in return! What a happiness will one day be theirs, when the aureola of Virginity is bestowed on them, and they are admitted into that chosen band of virgins that accompany the Lamb of God whithersoever He goes, and sing a canticle of praise and adoration which none others in the celestial kingdom are privileged to sing!

How many boys and young men, realizing that earthly advantages, money, pleasure, independence and sensual gratifications, when viewed in the light of eternity, are the veriest folly and madness, and that to live for them is in the eyes of heaven to act the part of an insane man, would courageously renounce the world and generously dedicate themselves to the service of their divine Redeemer! Those who feel themselves called to the priestly life would unhesitatingly give up all earthly prospects to consecrate themselves to the work of saving immortal souls; others would promptly follow the invitation to join communities that make either teaching and the education of youth, or the care of the sick their life-work; while many others, again, would cheerfully embrace the opportunities of storing up great spiritual wealth by serving God in the humble position occupied by lay-brothers in religious houses.

And lastly, Catholic parents, far from interfering, as now they frequently do, with the workings of divine grace in their sons and daughters, would on the contrary, do all in their power to aid them in following the call to the religious life, fully persuaded that their children's greater sanctity will redound to their own greater reward both here and hereafter.

CHAPTER VII

"AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY"

1. HEAVEN THE PRIZE TO BE WON.

"Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life." [1]

You have learned, dear Reader, the glorious destiny intended for you by your heavenly Father. "It hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom." [2] But it depends solely and entirely on yourself whether you will one day take actual possession of it, or forfeit it for all eternity. God will supply all the helps that are necessary, but you must do your share of the work. No one else can do it for you; God Himself will not save you, unless you co-operate with Him. Surrender yourself then, to a service of love and filial generosity, and your eternal inheritance will infallibly be given you when the time of your probation is ended. At the same time remember that a particular amount of this inheritance will fall to your share, and that this particular amount depends on the

[1] Apoc. 2; 10. [2] Luke 12; 32.

use you make of God's grace, and the kind and number of merits you acquire by the performance of good works.

2. THE EASINESS OF SALVATION.

"That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." [1]

You have seen in this little volume in what merit consists; what conditions you must fulfil in order to render your actions meritorious; what you must do to make every moment of your life a source of merit; you have learned how liberally God rewards every good work with a five-fold recompense, and what are the seven causes that may combine to render your good works meritorious of a maximum of reward in heaven.

Does not this little study of the interesting subject of supernatural merit emphasize what we may call the "Easiness of Salvation"? Yes, for a minimum of service God will give you a maximum of reward, in the shape of an "eternal weight of glory exceedingly above measure", as St. Paul characterizes it. Remember, even if great sacrifices, such as life-long endurance of extreme and unabating pain, were made the purchase-price of heaven, there would be no comparison possible between the price paid and the reward purchased. "I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." [2] But there are very

[1] 2 Cor. 4; 17. [2] Rom. 8; 18.

few of whom God asks such heroic service as the purchase-price of eternal glory. Of most men He asks merely that they sanctify the little things of daily life, practise charity towards their fellow-men, and bear with loving resignation the occasional sufferings which in His Wisdom and Love He inflicts for the sole purpose of promoting the welfare of their souls. It is well to remember, that these sufferings are blessings in disguise; for many a man is rescued by means of them from a life of sin and crime and from future eternal perdition.

In order to stimulate yourself to zeal in the work of rendering all your actions meritorious in the highest degree, you must never lose sight of heaven, its beauty, glory, happiness and endless duration. The thought of the great things God has prepared for you should serve as an inspiration to you at all times and under all circumstances, but especially when your enemy, the devil, raises difficulties in order to turn you aside from the path of virtue, that by going after forbidden pleasures you may lose your eternal inheritance. Rest assured, when once the vivid remembrance of heaven has taken complete possession of you, it will dominate all your activity. On the one hand you will long for the happy moment when your soul shall quit her earthly habitation to take possession of her throne in God's eternal kingdom, while on the other you will thank God most fervently for every moment He still continues to add to your earthly life, because you realize that as long as life lasts you can add indefinitely to the treasure that you have already laid up in the heart of your Father in heaven. If a

single moment suffices to enable a sinner to win heaven by a fervent act of contrition, what increase of grace may you not obtain by employing every moment of your life in God's faithful service, working with a large supply of grace?

3. THE EXAMPLE OF THE "CHILDREN OF THE WORLD."

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."[1]

Let it henceforth be your constant aim to accumulate a large store of supernatural merits. To do so successfully, imitate the example of the children of the world, who have set their heart on becoming rich and "making money." Such men are wide awake; they allow no opportunity of new gains or profitable investments to escape them; they know how to calculate to a nicety how much this or that investment will yield and they take care to hedge in their ventures with all available precautions. Imitate them in this as your divine Savior frequently exhorts you to do. But in order to rouse yourself to sustained application to the work of laying up treasure in heaven, you must meditate often on His instructions on this point. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice. . . . Sell what you possess and give alms. Make to yourselves bags which grow not old; a treasure in heaven which faileth not."[2] "And seek not (over-solicitously) what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, and be not lifted up on high. For all these things do

[1] Luke 16: 8. [2] Luke 12; 31, 33.

the nations of the world seek." [1] "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth." [2] "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." [3] Take heed not to merit the reproach: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of the light." [4]

4. AN INTERESTING CALCULATION.

"I cease not to pray . . . that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing, fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." [5]

Consider, for example, what an eternal weight of glory you can amass by a few good works selected at random. (1.) Suppose you hear Mass and communicate daily. Making allowance for a few unavoidable omissions, you will annually have to your credit 360 Masses and 360 Communions. These numbers will swell greatly as years go by. In ten years there will be 3,600; in twenty-five years 7,200, and in fifty years no less than 18,000 Masses and Communions. Next consider the various other causes that combine to determine the precise amount of merit, and see how they may enhance the value of these two works. (a.) We can easily rank them as works of the greatest intrinsic

[1] Luke 12; 29.
[2] Luke 12; 15.
[3] Matt. 6; 19.
[4] Luke 16; 8.
[5] Col. 1; 10.

excellence, and as such they are productive of an exceedingly great increase of grace; (b.) you may perform them under the influence of an exceptionally high degree of sanctifying grace, especially after several years of faithful service; (c.) a very high degree of purity and fervor of intention may animate you in their performance; (d.) you may have to perform them under the stress of great difficulties, both exterior and interior. Thus you may have to suffer much from heat or cold in order to assist at Mass, from loss of sleep and rest by reason of early rising, from the inconveniences of the fast, or perhaps from the jeers and ridicule and persecutions, even, that your devotion may invite on your head; or it may happen — and very likely will happen — that you experience at times great dryness and coldness of spirit, loss of sensible devotion, or an unaccountable deep-seated disgust, which render the faithful performance of these devotions extremely painful and difficult. Recollecting, then, that all these circumstances may unite to give a very special value to these actions, we can readily conclude that an amazingly large amount of merit may be gained by daily Mass and Communion alone. And if you are a religious, you enjoy still greater advantages, by reason of your state of higher merit.

(2.) Let us take the performance of an act of charity to a poor or sick person. (a.) You deny yourself some pleasure in order to have both time and money to help him; (b.) you courageously conquer natural repugnances that arise from unpleasant surroundings; (c.) you perform that act of charity with

a tenderness that could not be greater if you were privileged to serve our Lord in person; (d.) you do it with the greatest possible fervor and purity of intention; (e.) you repeat that act, either towards the same person or towards others as often as your duties and means allow. Who can calculate the increase of merit you may gain by such acts of charity?

(3.) Let us take just one more example. The devout recitation of the Hail Mary will earn for you a certain amount of merit. If you recite daily the Beads and the Angelus, you will say no less than sixty-two Hail Marys every day. This will amount to 22,630 in one year. But since the various causes of the difference of merit will unite to determine the precise amount of merit to be gained, you can easily conclude that this trifling act of devotion may earn for you an immense amount of eternal reward.

Now these few works are only a minute fraction of the myriads of actions you must of necessity perform in your lifetime — of actions that you must perform and cannot leave undone; why not compel yourself by a holy violence to sanctify them all and render them as meritorious as possible? Grace to do so is never wanting, so that any failure in this point is always due to some negligence on your part.

5. THE ENEMY OF YOUR MERITS.

"Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith."[1]

How does it come that men are so lamentably indif-

[1] 1 Peter 5; 8.

ferent to their spiritual interests in general, and to the work of laying treasure in heaven in particular? A little reflection will convince us that some sinister agency is at work making men forgetful of the stern realities of the life to come. It is this: The devil, the enemy of God and man, enraged at the fact that men are created to enjoy in heaven the glory that was lost by the fallen angels, leaves nothing undone not alone to rob souls of their eternal inheritance, but also to plunge them into the deepest abyss of misery.

This is a point that you cannot afford to overlook or treat lightly. You have an enemy, a fierce, cruel, relentless enemy, to contend with in your endeavor to win the glory of heaven. His aim is to rob you of your destiny at any cost; and in this he will not give up until your eyes have closed in death. And should he fail to gain his principal object, it will still give him immense satisfaction, if, by inducing you to negligence in God's service, he can rob you of at least a portion of the happiness intended for you.

Hence you must always reckon with him, learn his tactics and be watchful. Ignorance or forgetfulness of his existence, presence, malice and activity, or the failure to take a serious view of his methods, must inevitably result in great losses to your soul. Learn then, to take a serious view of a truth, which our Lord repeatedly brings to your attention both by His teachings and miracles. "The devil cometh, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest believing they should be saved."[1] "Satan hath desired to have you."[2] "He goes about like a roaring lion, seeking

[1] Luke 8; 12. [2] Luke 22; 31.

whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith";[1] *i. e.,* your faith will teach you how to encounter his temptations and escape his wiles.

6. PERSEVERANCE CROWNED.

"Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to his works."[2]

But while you must have a wholesome fear of the enemy of your salvation, you must not grow discouraged and dismayed at the prospects of a long-drawn contest, nor lose heart at the fierceness of the struggle; for God Himself is fighting on your side. With His aid you are bound to win an unbroken series of glorious victories. And not only this. Your life-long battle against this enemy will serve to enhance most wonderfully the brilliancy of your crown of eternal glory. Only take care on the one hand to realize your extreme weakness when you rely on your own strength; and on the other, your invincibility when you rest on the all powerful arm of God. Learn a lesson from the ivy. When this plant grows in the open, its branches, creeping along the ground and unable to rise, are crushed under the feet of men and hoofs of animals; but when it is planted near a wall, these branches rise high in the air, and thrive in a most luxuriant manner. In a similar manner you must cling to your divine Savior, who will not and cannot abandon you if you trust and confide in His infinite goodness and love. Remember, He loves you with an eternal love; He prayed, worked, suffered for you dur-

[1] 1 Peter 5; 8. [2] Apoc. 22; 12.

ing His earthly life, and shed the very last drop of His precious blood for you, and the one great desire of His Divine Heart now is to bestow on you in due time a most magnificent reward of endless glory and happiness, as He expressly declares in these words: "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given me, may be with me, that they may see my glory, which Thou hast given me." [1]

7. HEAVEN GAINED — THE ETERNAL INHERITANCE SECURED.

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" [2]

Heaven is gained! You are saved! Saved with such a glorious salvation! What human mind could possibly conceive the immensity of the joy that will flood your glorified soul at the moment when you behold for the first time the glorified humanity of your divine Savior and hear from His blessed lips the gracious invitation to take possession of the eternal throne of matchless glory that you have prepared for yourself by your fidelity in His love and service and your diligence in "laying up treasure in heaven"! What music in that sentence which will confirm you in glory: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will place thee over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." What rejoicings, too, will be in the whole heavenly kingdom! God the Father will recognize in

[1] John 17; 24. [2] Matt. 25; 34.

you a perfect resemblance to His Eternal Son; the Holy Spirit will take delight in now manifesting to you the wonders of God's infinite goodness and love; and the angels and saints will congratulate you on the successful termination of your probation on earth, and bless God that another saint is added to their happy band. And finally, when amidst the unanimous applause of the whole heavenly court Jesus Christ, whom you served so faithfully during life, shall conduct you to your throne and place on your brow the brilliant crown of immortal glory, you will begin to understand the full significance of the words of St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" [1]; and, "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." [2] The immense happiness and unalloyed bliss that will result from the sight, knowledge and possession of God, will make you exclaim in sentiments of deepest gratitude: "O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee!" [3] "O how Thou hast multiplied Thy mercy, O God . . . Thou hast inebriated me with the plenty of Thy house, and made me drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure,[4] . . . Thou hast crowned me with glory and honor!" [5]

What tongue can tell, what mind conceive, the exquisite pleasure derived from the enjoyment of your

[1] 1 Cor. 2; 9.
[2] Rom. 8; 18.
[3] Ps. 30; 20.
[4] Ps. 35; 8.
[5] Ps. 8; 6.

exalted degree of essential and accidental glory! What joy in the thought that you acted so wisely on earth in leading a life of faith, hope, love and devoted service of God, which procured for you this inconceivable bliss for all eternity! How sweet to recall the trials endured, the afflictions borne, the crosses carried, the pleasures sacrificed, the alluring temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil courageously overcome, the prayers said, the devotions performed, the many acts of charity, mercy, kindness, mortification, self-denial and self-immolation practised on earth for the sake of heaven! What a happy exchange indeed — a momentary service rewarded with an eternity of absolutely perfect felicity!

Transported with sentiments of tenderest gratitude, you will unite yourself with the angels and saints to praise and adore forever the Author and Finisher of your salvation, chanting with them the canticle of thanksgiving: "To Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honor, and glory, and power, for ever and ever." [1]

[1] Apoc. 5; 13.

THE END

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